THE SINS OF THE CHILDREN

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A NOVEL

BY

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THE SINS OF THE CHILDREN

PART ONE

YOUTH

I

When Peter Guthrie laughed the rooks stirred on the old trees behind the Bodleian and the bored cab-drivers who lolled in uncomfortable attitudes on their cabs in St. Giles perked up their heads.

He threw open his door one morning and leaving one of these laughs of his rolling round the quad of St. John's College found the recumbent form of Nicholas Kenyon all among his cushions as usual, and as usual smoking his cigarettes and reading his magazines. The words "as usual" seemed to be stamped on his forehead.

"What d'you think?" cried Peter, filling the room like a thirty-mile gale.

"You ought to know that I don't think. It's a form of exercise that I never indulge in." Kenyon lit a fresh cigarette from the one which he had half-smoked and with peculiar expertness flicked the end out of the window into St. Giles Street, which ran past the great gates of the college. He hoped that it might have fallen on somebody's head, but he didn't get up to see.

"Well," said Peter, "I was coming down the High just now and an awful pretty girl passed with a Univ. man. She looked at me — thereby very nearly laying me flat on my face — and I heard her ask, 'Who's that?' It was the man's answer that makes me laugh. He said: 'Oh, he's only a Rhodes scholar!'" And off he went again.

Nicholas Kenyon raised his immaculate person a few inches and looked round at his friend. The Harvard man, with his six-foot-one of excellent muscles and sinews, his square shoulders and deep chest, and his fine, honest, alert and healthy face, made most people ask who he was. "If I'd been you," said Kenyon, "I should have made a mental note of that Univ. blighter in order to land him one the next time you saw him, that he wouldn't easily forget."

"Why? I liked it, from a man of his type. I've been 'only a damned Rhodes scholar' to all the little pussy purr-purrs ever since I first walked the High in my American-made clothes. I owe that fellow no grudge; and if I meet that girl again — which I shall make a point of doing — I bet you anything you like that his scoffing remark will lend a touch of romance to me which will be worth a lot."

"Was she something out of the ordinary?"

"Quite," said Peter.

He hung his straw hat on the electric bulb, threw off his coat, rolled up his sleeves and started to tidy up his rooms with more energy and deftness than is possessed by the average housemaid. He flicked the little pile of cigarette ash, which Kenyon had dropped on the

floor, into a corner. He gathered the weekly illustrated papers which Kenyon had flung aside and put them on a back shelf, and then he picked up the man Kenyon in his arms, deposited him in a wide armchair in front of the fireplace and started punching all the cushions.

Kenyon looked ineffably bored. "Good God!" he said. "What's all this energy? You shatter my nervous system."

"My dear chap," said Peter, "you seem to forget that this is Commem. and that my people have come three thousand miles to see their little Peter in his little rooms. I'm therefore polishing up the knocker of the big front door. My mother has a tidy mind and I want my father to gain the impression that I'm methodical and responsible. He has a quick eye. They wired me from London last night to say that they'll be here at five o'clock to tea. I dashed round to the Randolph early this morning to book rooms for them. Gee, it's a big party, too! I can't make out why they want so many rooms. It'll be like my sister to have brought over one of her school friends. I guess I shall be darned glad to see them, anyway."

There was a touch of excitement in the boy's voice, and his sun-tanned, excellent face showed the delight that he felt. He had not seen his mother, brother and sister for two years, having spent his vacations in England.

Nicholas Kenyon got up slowly. He did everything slowly. "Well," he said, "I thank God that my people don't bother me on these festive occasions.

To my way of thinking the influx of fathers and mothers into Oxford makes the whole place provincial. However, I can understand your childish glee. You are pretty badly dipped, I understand, and with the true psychology of the rasping undergraduate you are first going to throw the glamour of the city of spires over your untravelled parent and then touch him for a fairly considerable cheque."

Peter gave a sort of laugh. "Touch my father!" he said. "Not much. I shall put my case up to my mother. She's the one who does these little things."

Kenyon was faintly interested. Being perennially impecunious himself and unable to raise money even from the loan sharks, he looked to the advent of Peter's parents to bring him at least fifty pounds. He always borrowed from Peter.

"Oh, I see," he said. "It's the old lady who carries the money-bags, is it?"

"No, it isn't," said Peter; "but as a matter of fact I never have gone to my father for anything and I don't think I ever shall. I don't know why it is, but none of us have ever been able to screw up courage to say more than 'Good-morning' and 'Good-night' to the Governor, although of course we all think he is a very wonderful person."

Kenyon yawned. "I see," he said. "Bad luck. I should hate to have such a disagreeable devil for a father — one of the martinet type, who says *don't* all the time when he ought to say *do,* and makes home a sort of pocket-hell for everybody."

Peter twisted round and spoke quickly and rather

warmly. "So should I," he said, "but luckily I haven't. I didn't want to suggest that my father was that type of man. He's one of the very best — one of the men who count for something in my country. He's worked like a dog to give us a chance in life and his generosity makes me personally sometimes feel almost indecent. I mean that I feel that I have taken advantage of him,— but — but, somehow or other,— oh, I don't know,— we don't seem to know each other — that's all. He hasn't the knack of winning our confidence — or something. So it comes to this: when we want anything we ask mother and she gets it for us. That's all there's to it. And look here, Nick, I want you to be frightfully nice to the Governor. Get out of your ice-box and warm up to the old man. I can't, you see; but as he has come all this way to look me up I want somebody to show some appreciation."

With his eyes to the small relief which the visit of Dr. Hunter Guthrie, of New York City, might bring him, Nicholas Kenyon nodded. "Rely on me," he said. "Butter shan't melt in my mouth; and before your father leaves Oxford I'll make him feel that he's been created a Baronet and appointed Physician in Ordinary to His Majesty the King. Well, so long, Peter! I'm lunching with Lascelles at the House this morning. I'll drop in to tea and hand cakes round to your beloved family."

"Right-o," said Peter. "That'll be great!" And when the door closed and he found himself alone he arranged a certain number of silver cups which he had won in athletics all along his mantel-piece, for his

father to see, gazed at them for a moment with a half-smile of rather self-conscious pride, finished tidying his room, gazed affectionately for a few moments at the familiar sight of Pusey House through the leaf-crowded trees that lined the sunny street, and then sat down to his piano and played a rag-time with all that perfect excellence and sense of rhythm which had opened the most insular doors to him during his first days as a fresher.

II

This fine big fellow, Peter Murray Guthrie, who had done immensely well at Harvard in athletics and was by no means a fool intellectually, could afford to be amused at the fact that he had been scoffingly referred to as "only a Rhodes scholar." He had been born under a lucky star and he had that wonderful gymnastic faculty of always falling on his feet. If with all his suspicions aroused he had gone up to Oxford in the same rather timid, self-conscious, on-the-defensive manner of the average Rhodes scholar who expected to be treated as a creature quite different from the English undergraduate, he would have found his way to the American Club and stayed there more or less permanently, taking very little part in the glorious multitudinous life of the freshmen of his college, and remained a sort of pariah of his own making. Freshmen themselves, the Lord knows, are forlorn enough. Everything is strange to them, too,—society, rules, customs, unwritten laws and faces.

They are solitary creatures in the midst of a bustling crowd. If they do not come from one of the great public schools and meet again the men they knew there their chance of making friends is small and for many dull disappointing weeks they must mope and look-on and envy and find their feet alone, suffering, poor devils, from a hideous sheepishness and wondering, with a sort of morbid self-consciousness, what others are thinking of them. But Peter was unafraid. He stalked into Oxford prepared to find it the finest place on earth — with his imagination stirred at the sight of those old colleges whose quadrangles echoed with the feet of the great dead and rang with those of the younger generation to whom life was a great adventure and who might spring from those old stones into everlasting fame. He strode through the gate of St. John's with his chin high, prepared to serve her with all his strength and all the best of his youth and leave her finally unsullied by his name. He didn't give a single whoop for all this talk about the snobbishness and insularity of English undergraduates. He didn't believe that he would find a college divided and subdivided into sets; and if the statement proved to be true — well, he intended to break all the barriers down.

Therefore, with such a spirit added to his fine frank, manly personality, irresistible laugh, great big friendly hand and the rumours that came with him of his bull-like rushes on the football field, he became at once a marked man. Second-year and even third-year men nudged each other when he passed. "By Jove!" they said. "That's a useful looking cove! We must get

him down to the river." Or, "I wonder if that American can be taught to play cricket?" As for the freshers — all as frightened as a lot of rabbits far away from their warren — they gazed with shy admiration and respect at Peter, who, expecting no rebuffs, received none.

Finding that he could not live in college until he was a second-year man, Peter had looked about him among the freshers for a likely person with whom to share rooms. He had come up in the train with Nicholas Kenyon, whose shell he had insisted upon opening. He, too, was entered at St. John's and was very ready — being impecunious — to share lodgings with the American whose allowance he might share and whose personality was distinctly unusual. These two then gravitated to Beaumont Street, captured a large sitting-room and two bed-rooms on the ground floor, and from the first evening of their arrival were perfectly at home. Peter at once hired a piano from a music shop in the High which he quickly discovered, bought several bottles of whiskey and a thousand cigarettes, besides several pounds of pipe tobacco, threw open his window, and as soon as dinner was over started playing rag-times.

Kenyon had been interested and amused. He had not expected to find himself "herding," as he put it, with a damned Rhodes scholar. He took it for granted that these "foreigners" would live apart from the ordinary undergraduate, as uncouth people should. He had been quick to notice, however,— psychology being his principal stock in trade,— that Peter had

made an instant impression; and as he sat on the window-sill listening with what he had to confess to himself was keen pleasure to Peter's masterly manipulation of the piano and saw all the windows within near range of their house open and heads poke out to listen, he was able — without any propheticism — to say that Peter would quickly be the centre of a set. He would certainly not be sulking in the American Club.

Very quickly P. M. Guthrie, of St. John's, became "Peter" to the whole college — and stroke in the freshers' boat. The other Rhodes scholars owed everything that was good to him. He stood by them loyally, made his rooms their headquarters, and all who wanted to know him were obliged to know them. He introduced swipes at the first freshers' concert in the Hall, with enormous success, selecting Forbes Nicholl, of Brasenose; Watson Frick, of Wadham; Baldwin Colgate, of Worcester; and Madison Smith, of Merton, all good Americans, for the purpose. Even Dons stayed to listen on that epoch-making occasion and the fame of their curious and delightful method of singing spread all over the university. It was easy. There was nothing else like it.

Quite unconsciously Peter was for a little while the whole topic of conversation at Dons' dinners. These hide-bound professors were really quite surprised at the remarkable way in which, at one fell swoop, this man Peter Guthrie had managed to weld together the English and American undergraduates for the first time in their knowledge. Some of them put it all down to his piano playing — and were very nearly

right. Others conceived his great laugh to be mainly responsible — and were not far short of the mark. But it was Nicholas Kenyon, the psychologist, who put his finger on the whole truth of this swift and unbelievable success. He said that it was Peter's humanity which had conquered Oxford, and in so doing proved — impecunious only son of an absolutely broke peer as he was — that he would be able to make a very fair living in the future on his wits. It may be said that he never intended to work.

It was part of Peter's honesty and simplicity to remain American. He made no effort to ape the Oxford manner of speech. He would see himself shot before he got into the rather effeminate clothes affected by the Oxford man. He continued to be natural, to remain himself, and not to take on the colors chameleon-wise of those about him. His Stetson hat was the standing joke of St. John's. Nevertheless, there was not one man in the college who would not have hit hard if any derogatory remarks had been thrown at the head inside it. His padded shoulders, upholstered ties and narrow belt were all frequently caricatured, but the sound of Peter's laugh gathered men together like the music of the Pied Piper of Hamelin. It was just that this man Peter Guthrie was a *man* that made him not only accepted in a place seething with quaint and foolish habits, out-of-date shibboleths and curious unwritten laws, but loved and respected. Here was one to whom merely to live was a joy. To the despondent he came therefore as a tonic. He exuded breeziness filled with ozone. His

continuous high spirits infected even those foolish boys who were encrusted with affectation and stuccoed with the petty side and insolence of Eton. He worked hard and played hard and slept like a dog, ate hearty and drank like a thirsty plant. Also he smoked like a factory chimney. He had no crankish views — no tolerance for "isms," and was not ashamed to stride into chapel and say his prayers like a simple boy. In short, "unashamed" was his watchword, and he had been endowed with the rare gift of saying "No," and sticking to it. And to Nicholas Kenyon, who frequented the rooms of the so-called intellectuals — those "little dreadful clever people" who parroted and perverted other men's thoughts and possessed no originality of their own — it was a stroke of genius on Peter's part to have nothing but the photographs of his family all over his rooms. He must be a big man, Nicholas said to himself, who could afford, among the very young, to dispense with the female form divine in his frames — the nudes so generally placed in them — in order to convey the impression of being devilish wise and bad. Also it showed, according to this human merchant, a peculiar strength of character on Peter's part to bolt his door regularly one evening a week so that he might sit down uninterrupted and write a tremendous screed to his mother. However, that was Peter the man-boy — Peter the Rhodes scholar — Peter the Oxford man — who always wound up his musical evenings with the "Star Spangled Banner." And there was just one other side to this big, simple fellow's character which puzzled and

annoyed the bloodless, clever parasite who lived with him and upon him,— women.

Now, Nicholas Kenyon — the Honourable Nicholas Augustus Fitzhugh Kenyon — was a patron of the drama. That is to say, he had the right somehow to enter the stage door of the Theatre Royal at all times, and did so whenever the theatre was visited by a musical comedy company. He was known to innumerable chorus girls as "Boy-dear," and made a point of entertaining them at luncheon and supper during their visits to the university town. He brought choice specimens of this breed to Beaumont Street for tea and tittle-tattle and introduced them to Peter, who liked them very much and would have staked his life upon their being angels. But when it came to driving out to small unnoticeable inns, Peter squared his shoulders and stayed at home.

"The devil take it!" said Nicholas one night, with frightful frankness which was devoid of any intentional insolence. "What's this cursed provincialism that hangs to you? I suppose it comes from the fact that you were born in a shack to the tinkle of the trolley-car!"

Peter's howl of laughter made the piano play an immaculate tune. "Wrong," he said. "Gee! but you're absolutely wrong. The whole thing comes to this, Nick: One of these fine days I'm going to be married. The girl I marry is going to be clean. I believe in fairness. *I'm* going to be clean. That's all there is to it."

So that, one way and another, Dr. Hunter G. Guth-

rie, of New York, as well as St. John's College, Oxford, had several reasons to be rather proud of this man Peter.

III

One o'clock that afternoon found Peter still hammering on his piano, not only to the intense delight of three snub-nosed tradesmen's boys who delayed delivery of mutton-chops and soles, which were only plaice, but also of five people who had come quietly into the room. They stood together watching and listening and waiting for him suddenly to discover that he was not alone. One was a tall, rather angular, clean-shaven, noticeably intellectual man whose thin hair was grey and who wore very large glasses with tortoise-shell frames, through which he looked with pale, short-sighted eyes. He held a grey hat in his thin hand and stood watching the boy — who made his piano do the work of a full band — with a smile of infinite pride on his lips. Another was a little lady, all soft and sweet, with a bird-like face and a curious bird-like appearance. All about her there was a sort of perennial youthfulness, and the goodness of her kind heart gleamed so openly in her eyes that they asked beggars and cripples, itinerant musicians, ragamuffins, street dogs and all humbugs to come and be helped. At that moment they were full of tears, although little lines of laughter were all about them. Another was a slight, exceedingly good-looking young man whose hair went into a series of small waves and

was brushed away from his forehead. He was grinning like a Cheshire cat and showing two rows of teeth which would make a dentist both envious and annoyed. There was a slight air of precocity about his clothes. Two girls made up the rest of the party. Both were young and slim and of average height. Both were unmistakably American in their fearless independence and cleanness of cut. One was dark, with almost black eyebrows which just failed to meet in the middle. Her eyes were amazing and as full of danger as a maxim,— large and blue — the most astonishing blueness. They were framed with long, thick, black lashes. Her lips were rather full and red, and her skin white. She might have been an Italian or a Spaniard. The other girl was blonde and slim, with large grey eyes set widely apart, a small patrician nose and a lovely little mouth turning up at the corners.

How long all these people would have stayed watching and listening no man can say. Suddenly, in the middle of a bar, Peter sprang up and turned round. His cry of joy and the way in which he plunged forward and picked up the little bird-like woman in his arms was very good to see.

"Mother!" he cried. "Mother! Oh, Gee! This is great!" and he kissed her cheeks and her hands, and then her cheeks again, all the while making strange, small, fond noises like a little boy who comes back home after the holidays.

"Oh, dear, dear Peter!" said the little woman, between tears and laughter. "How splendidly rough

you are! You shake me to pieces! Where *shall* I be able to tidy my hair?"

Then, with a rather constrained air and a touch of nervous cordiality, Peter turned to his father and took his hand. "How are you, father?" he asked. "You look fine."

Dr. Hunter Guthrie swallowed something and gave a murmur which remained incoherent. Before he could pull himself together, Peter was hugging his sister, who squealed like a pig from the tightness of this man's mighty grasp. And then the brother came in for it and winced with pain and pleasure as his hand was taken in a vise-like grip.

"Hello, Graham!"

"Hello, Peter!"

And then everybody except Peter burst out laughing. He stood in front of the fair girl, with his mouth wide open, and held out his hand and said: "I was going to hunt the whole place for you,—I beg your pardon." It was when he drew back, with his face and neck the color of a beet root, that the laughter reached its climax.

Belle Guthrie was the first to find her voice. "Well, Peter," she said, "that's going some. Is an introduction superfluous in Oxford? Where did you meet Betty Townsend?"

"I haven't met her," said Peter. "I saw her this morning in the High for a second—" He ran his finger round his collar and moved from one foot to the other and shifted his great shoulders. No man on this earth had ever looked so uncomfortable.

And then, with consummate coolness, Betty Townsend came to the rescue. "Just after we arrived this morning," she said, "and you were all buying picture post-cards, I passed Mr. Guthrie when I was walking along the High Street with Graham's friend. I recognized him from the photographs that you have at home, and I think he must have heard me ask, 'Who's that?' I naturally gave him a friendly look. That's all."

"I didn't catch the friendly look," said Peter. But he did catch the friendly tone and stored it up among his treasures. Then he suddenly stirred himself, being host, picked up his mother and placed her on his elaborate sofa; gave his best arm-chair to his father; waved his sister into the window-seat with her friend, and tilted Graham into a deck chair.

Standing in the middle of the room, beaming with pride, he said: "How in thunder did you get here so soon? Your wire said that you were coming to tea, and I was going to meet the train leaving Paddington at three-thirty. Gee! This is the best thing that ever happened! Will you lunch here?"

"Oh, no, dear!" said Mrs. Guthrie. "So many of us will worry your landlady."

Then out came one of Peter's huge laughs. "Worry my landlady? One look at Mrs. Brownstack would show you that she got over being worried before the great wind. Why she's kept lodgings for undergraduates for twenty years. It's the same thing as saying that she's spent the greater part of her life sitting on the top of Vesuvius. I can give you beer, beef,

pickles, biscuits, cake, swipes they call coffee, some corking Nougat and three brands of cigarettes."

"I think," said Dr. Guthrie, with a suggestion of haste, "it might be better if you lunched with us at the hotel." Like all doctors, his first thoughts were of digestion.

"Right-o!" said Peter, and he dived into his bedroom for a more respectable coat. His brother followed him in and the two stood facing each other for a moment, eye to eye. They had not met for two years. Instinctively they grasped hands again and the minds of both were filled with most affectionate things — a very flood of words — but one said "Old man!" and the other "Peter!" And while Graham brushed his kinky hair with a temporary suggestion of throatiness, Peter hauled out his best coat and whistled to show how utterly unmoved he was.

They returned to the sitting-room together. Dr. Guthrie was examining the conglomeration of books that loaded the shelves. The plays of Bernard Shaw rubbed shoulders with "Masterton on Land Taxes." Stevenson's "Treasure Island" leaned up against Webster's Dictionary. "Tono-Bungay" had for a companion a slushy novel by Garvice — and on them all was dust.

The little mother, all a-flutter like a thrush, was at the window looking through the trees at the warm old buildings opposite. The two girls were peering into a cupboard as into the "Blue Room," where they found nothing but a few whiskey bottles, several packs of cards, a box of chess-men, a couple of mortar-

boards with all their corners gone, and a large collection of white shoes in all grades of dilapidation.

"Are you all ready?" asked Dr. Guthrie, with a curious gayety. Among all this youth even he felt young.

"Rather," said Peter. "I could eat an ox."

He opened the door, touched his mother's soft cheek with his finger as she passed, tweaked his sister's hair, refrained from catching Betty Townsend's eyes, winked at his brother and drew back for his father.

Once in the quad Mrs. Guthrie whispered to Graham and went quickly out into St. Giles, beckoning to the two girls to follow. She was very anxious that Peter should walk with his father, and this — rather pleased with himself — Peter did. He would have taken his father's arm if he had dared, he was so mighty glad to see him. Several times the Doctor seemed about to do the same thing, but his hand hesitated and dropped. And so these two fell in step and walked silently along towards the Randolph Hotel, passed by men in twos or threes, many of whom, to the Doctor's inward delight, cried out, "Hullo, Peter!" with tremendous cordiality. It was not until they turned the corner that the Doctor spoke.

"It gives me real pleasure to see you again, Peter," he said, with a quick self-conscious glance at the young giant at his elbow.

"Thank you, father," said Peter, looking straight ahead and getting as red as a peony.

IV

Nicholas Kenyon more than lived up to his promise. In clothes into which he seemed to have been poured in liquid form, he handed hot toast and cakes to Peter's family at tea-time with that air of deferential impertinence which was his peculiar property. He had the same effect on the Doctor and Mrs. Guthrie and the two girls as he had on Peter when he first saw him on the train. His complete self-control, his indolent assurance, his greyhound look of thoroughbredness and the decorative way in which he phrased his sentences all charmed and amused them. For Peter's sake he came right out of his shell at once and behaved like a man who had been a favorite in that family circle for years. In the most subtle manner he implied to the Doctor that his fame as a bacteriologist had spread all over Oxford, and even England. He refused to believe that Mrs. Guthrie was the mother of her children and not her own eldest daughter. He asked Graham almost at once to do him the favor of giving him the name of his tailor, and told Betty that he had shot with her father, Lord Townsend, many times, well-knowing that he was a portrait painter in New York. With consummate ease and tact he put everybody on the best of terms with one another and themselves, thereby winning still more of Peter's admiration and liking. With great pleasure he accepted the Doctor's invitation to dine at the Randolph Hotel, and in return invited all present to be his guests at the

Open Air Performance of "Twelfth Night," later in the week, by the O.U.D.S., in the beautiful gardens of Worcester. In a word, he played with these people as a cat plays with a mouse and as he had always played with Peter. He used all his brain not only to win their confidence and friendship but to make an impression which might afterwards be of use to himself.

Nicholas Kenyon was one of those men who are born and not made. He opened his eyes to find himself in an atmosphere of aristocratic roguery. The beautiful old house in which his father lived was mortgaged to the very tops of the chimneys. It was maintained on money borrowed from the loan sharks at an exorbitant interest. It was filled with men and women who, like his own parents, were clever and intellectual enough to work for their livelihood, but who preferred to live on their wits and cling to society by the skin of their teeth. In this atmosphere of expert parasites — an atmosphere as false as it was light-hearted — Nicholas was brought up. He was a complete man of the world at fourteen. Even at that age he gambled, raced and borrowed money; and in order to provide himself with the necessities of life he ran a roulette table in secret at Eton and made a book for the racing bets of the little boys of his own kidney. Highly gifted and endowed with a most likable personality, with the art of eluding punishment for misdeeds brought to a masterly completeness, he could have been shaped, under different circumstances, into a man whose name would stand high in his country. With the proper training and discipline and the

right sense of duty which is given to those lucky lads whose parents are responsible and honorable he had it in his power to become a famous diplomat. As it was, he entered Oxford as a parasite and would leave the university for the world in the same capacity. He was entirely unscrupulous. He had no code of honor. He quietly used the men about him to provide him with amusement, money, hospitality, and to insure him against having to work. He turned his personality into a sort of business asset — a kind of limited liability company — which brought him in regular dividends. His breeding and good form, his well-known name and his inherent ability to slide comfortably into any set or society, made him wholly irresistible. No one suspected him, because his frankness disarmed suspicion. His knowledge of human nature told him that the paradox of his being poor lent him a sort of romance, and he always began by telling new acquaintances that he was broke to the wide. In this way he struck the honest note of the men who disdain to convey false impressions. He was poor, but proud, and made himself so attractive and companionable that men were delighted to be put to great expense in order to entertain him,— and he wanted everything of the very best. His clothes were immaculate. His cigarettes were freshly rolled. When he drove a car it had to be of the best known make. He was a most fastidious reader and had once read a paper on modern poetry which had startled the Dons of his college. He contributed short satirical articles to the Isis from time to time which tickled the intellect of the more dis-

criminating; and as a fresher had given a performance of Puck in one of the productions of the O.U.D.S., over which undergraduate critics went raving mad. Even in his dealings with his friends, the chorus girls, there was a certain touch of humour which made it impossible even for the most straightlaced to say hard things of him.

In a word, Nicholas Kenyon was a very dangerous man. His influence was as subtly bad and pernicious as a beautifully made cigarette heavily charged with dope; and he would at any time if necessary have stolen his mother's toilet set in order to provide himself with caviar, plover's eggs and a small bottle of champagne.

And this was the man who had shared rooms with Peter Guthrie during his terms at Oxford, and of whom the Doctor spoke that first night of his stay at the Randolph Hotel as an unusually charming person whom it was a pleasure to meet.

In fact, he was the sole topic of conversation in all the bedrooms of Peter's family party before the lights were turned out. Mrs. Guthrie said, as she sat in front of the dressing-table combing her hair: "How lucky it is, dear, that Peter has found such a wonderful friend here! He is so English and so refined — in every sense of the word a gentleman." The Doctor thoroughly agreed with her and made a mental note to invite Kenyon to his house in New York in the autumn.

Belle Guthrie took her brushes into Betty's room, which was next to her own, and looking extremely attractive in a pale pink kimono, with her dark

hair all about her shoulders and her naked feet in pink, heelless slippers, gave a ripple of excited laughter and confided to her friend that she was going to have a more bully time even than she had hoped. "I love St. John's College," she said, "and these wonderful old streets and all the church bells which strike so frequently — but I'm perfectly crazy about Nicholas Kenyon. He is so,— so different — so witty — says such perfectly wonderful things — and oh, my dear! *did* you see the way he looked at me when he said 'good-night'?"

Betty shook her head — her little golden head — her rather wise little head. "I didn't look," she said. "The light was shining on Peter's face, and that was good enough for me."

What Graham thought of Kenyon came out in Peter's rooms, to which he had gone back with his brother when the family were left at the hotel after their return from a jaunt on the river in the moonlight after dinner,— the quiet, soothing, narrow stream on which they had floated in punts all among cushions and listened with keen appreciation to the throbbing song of the nightingale and the deep voice of an undergraduate singing "Annie Laurie" in the back water to the thrumming accompaniment of a mandolin.

Kenyon himself had gone round to the rooms of some friends of his to play bridge, so the two brothers were able to talk undisturbed. The night was deliciously warm and Peter's old windows, with their numerous leaded panes, were wide open. It was

eleven o'clock and the life of the town had almost ceased, although from time to time little parties of undergraduates passed along St. Giles and their high-spirited laughter drifted up.

After having put cigarettes in front of his brother, Peter flung himself full stretch upon his sofa, with a pipe between his teeth. "Now for your news, old man!" he said. "I'm glad you like Nick. He certainly is one of the best. What seems perfectly amazing to me is that while I'm still a sort of schoolboy, rowing and reading, you're a full-blown man earning your living. I'd give something to see you buzzing about Wall Street with your head full of stocks and shares and the rise and fall of prices. How do you do it?"

Graham ran his hand rather nervously over his mouth. "It's great!" he said excitedly. "That's what I call life. Gee! You've no idea how fascinating it is to gamble on the tape and get a thrill every time you hear it tick. It's like living among earthquakes. I love it!"

"Gamble!" Peter echoed the word with a touch of fright. "Good Lord; but you don't gamble surely? I thought you were a broker and looked after other people's concerns!"

Graham shot out a short laugh. "Other people's concerns? Why, yes; but we're not in Wall Street for other people. I've had the luck of the devil lately though,— everything I've touched has gone wrong. However, don't let's talk about that. I'm here for a holiday and a rest, and I need 'em. I believe I was

on the verge of a nervous breakdown before I came away. When I get back I shall have to straighten things out. At the present moment I'm out about twenty thousand dollars."

It was his young brother who said these things — the boy who two years ago was only just out of Harvard. Peter sat up — in two senses. "You? Twenty thousand dollars! Have you told father?"

"My God, no!" said Graham. "I shall get it all back of course; otherwise,— Phut! As to telling father,— well — well, do you ever tell father anything? I'd rather face electrocution than go into father's room with such a tale. Once before — about six months ago — when I had to meet a bill for five thousand dollars, I had a little talk with mother, and after she had a fit she gave me a handful of her jewels to pawn. She was afraid of father, too. Within two months I got them out again. Steel did me very well that time; and mother,— bless her dear heart! — called me a very clever boy, and said: 'What a brain you have, darling, but please don't do it again!' Oh, my God, Peter! You don't know what Wall Street means. It's hell! It's marvellous! It's life! One of these days when a real good chance comes I'll go some plunge, and then you'll see me living quietly in the country breeding ponies or dogs or chickens or something, and I'll marry and settle down."

Peter got up, re-loaded his pipe, and said: "Just think of it! You're two years younger than I am. I've not begun to live and you're in the whirl of money and risk. In the meantime there's father so busy ex-

perimenting with microbes that he hasn't one idea of what his boys are doing, or are likely to do — absolutely content to let them find their feet unaided! Well, I suppose he knows what he's doing,— but what you've just told me makes me wonder whether it wouldn't be wise for him to experiment a little bit with us for a change. What d'you think?"

Graham shrugged his shoulders. With the light on his face he looked older than his brother, and there was something in his eyes which showed that he had already gazed at life very much more closely than the big healthy fellow who was his host. "Oh, well," he said — pouring himself out a rather stiff whiskey — "we've never known quite what it was to have a father, — I mean except as a sort of aloof institution, a vague person who educated us and placed us out. I should resent his butting in now. There's someone coming up your stairs, isn't there?"

There was. It was Kenyon, who rattled money in his trousers pocket with a little smile at the corners of his sophisticated mouth.

V

Peter put in the time of his life during the next few days, and like the great big simple fellow that he was, revelled in being the little hero of his family.

From morning until night he kept them on the move, taking them to all his favorite haunts in the town and out in the country, introducing to them whole flocks of

his friends, with whom they had tea and lunch; guiding them into the strange quiet chapels that were filled with the aroma of dead years like a bowl of dry rose-leaves; going with them into the sweet, quiet, sacred, stately seclusion of New College Garden and into the echoing cloisters of Magdalen. They were good days, memorable days, giving them all mental pictures that even time would not blur nor age rub out. To Peter the best of all the afternoons was the one when he looked up at the St. John's barge as he paddled out into the river in the College Eight and caught the eager and excited eyes of all the people who meant so much to him, and especially those of Betty. He rowed that afternoon as he had never rowed before, carrying with him all along the stream the raucous shouts of the members of his college who tore along the tow-path almost demented with enthusiasm, firing pistols, turning rattles and screaming "St. John's! St. John's! Give her ten! Give her ten! Up! Up!" And finally, when he staggered out of the boat almost sick from exertion, his knees shaking under him, the thought that came to him as he heard the incessant cries of "Good old Peter!" was "Thank God for this! The Governor will get something back for all he has done for me." He just waved his hand to his people, felt his way into the barge, laid himself flat on the floor and underwent the soothing process of being rubbed and sponged down — and all the while he smiled and was very happy.

He didn't catch the look of maternal agony in his mother's eyes nor her remarks — which was perhaps

just as well. Seeing her great big boy crumpled up over his oar before he was assisted out of the boat, seeing him stand rocking like a drunken man with his great chest heaving and his face the color of a green apple, she leaned over the rail and cried out: "Oh, my dear, what *have* they done to you? Oh, Hunter, you must *not* let him do these things, he'll kill himself! Oh, Peter, Peter!"

As a matter of fact, no one heard her. There was too much good solid roar going on. Every lusty-throated St. John's man was shouting at the full capacity of his lungs. Oh, but it was a good scene! And for the quiet, studious Doctor who had sat day after day for the greater part of his life watching bacteriological experiments, with the most intense interest, it was one that caused his blood to move almost dangerously through his veins and make him shout for the first time in his life.

It had a different effect upon temperamental Belle, who danced with excitement and kept on saying, in a sort of refrain, "Oh, I'm crazy about all this — simply crazy!" As for Graham, even the thrill of Wall Street seemed poor to him in comparison with this stirring scene,— the wild rush of men, the rhythmetic plunge of oars, the glorious muscular effort and the frenzied outburst.

Betty merely smiled, clasped her hands together and held her breath. It seemed to her that in Peter all the heroes of her youth,— Brian de Bois Guilbert, Ivanhoe and the rest,— were epitomized in the form, the splendid young giant form of her fellow-countryman.

Above all things in the world she wanted to lean over and put a wreath of laurels on the man who stroked the St. John's boat to victory. As it was, she cried a little, quietly and simply, not caring who saw her tears; and in her heart, for a reason which she herself found unexplainable, she sang "My Country 'tis of Thee." She had never in her life been so deeply stirred, and who can wonder at that? There is indeed something full of inspiration about these undergraduates' struggles on the water and the fervent partisanship of the colleges. It is unique and splendid and sends young men out into the world with good and beautiful memories and with the love and loyalty for their alma mater which makes them better able to serve the women who need them and the country to which they belong.

And when, having changed his shorts and got once more into his flannels, Peter went up to the roof of the barge, stinging with health and glowing with very natural pride and satisfaction, it was the Doctor whose hand he first took, and the Doctor who said: "My son, my dear son!" It was an extraordinary moment for Peter, who had never in his life before felt the indescribable barrier which existed between his father and himself so near to crumbling.

That night, while his father and mother and Graham were taken to the theatre by three of his fellow Rhodes scholars, to see a performance of one of Gilbert and Sullivan's plays, Peter and Nicholas Kenyon took Betty and Belle to the Worcester Ball, the two girls being under the wing of the wife of one of the Dons.

It was one of those warm, clear, silver nights which the fickle climate of England sometimes produces apparently to show what it can do when it likes. The moon was full and the sky was bespattered with stars. The trees on the smooth lawn round the old college flung their shadows as though in sunlight and it was to a seat under one of these that Peter led Betty just before midnight, having very nearly danced her off her feet. They sat down panting a little, and laughing for no reason, and listened for a moment to the strains of the band which drifted through the open windows of the hall.

It was not in Peter to do anything by halves. He worked and played like a Trojan and put his back into everything that he took up. He knew by this time, short as it was, that he was wholly and completely in love with the little girl, the first sight of whom had made him catch his breath. With a peculiar kind of grimness he had made up his mind that she was for him if he could win her, and all the previous night he had dreamed of her as his future wife, as the girl who would stand by his side, helpmate and everlasting lover, and for whom he would work well and live well and carry her with him rung by rung to the top of the ladder. He told himself when he awoke that he was a presumptuous ass even to dream that she would care for him. What was there in him for such a girl to care about? All the same, he set his teeth and from that moment laid all his future plans and his hopes and ambitions and all the best of his nature, at her little feet — and knew perfectly well that if Betty

could not love him eventually he would walk alone through life.

Odd, romantic or foolish as it may seem, when youth falls in and out of love so easily, this was true. Peter had, with a sort of unrealized solemnity, kept his heart free and pure. He was no trifler — he had never philandered. Like the boy who, perhaps unduly imaginative, believes that he will find the place where the rainbow ends, Peter said to himself: "One day I shall find my girl. I want to go to her heart-whole and complete."

There was nothing of sentimentality about this. It was simply the outcome of the effect of the mother-influence upon the boy which had become a very concrete thing. Somehow, ever since he was old enough to remember and to think, he had looked upon his mother as his sweetheart, and when she bent over his cot at night and asked God to bless him and left the touch of her soft lips upon his forehead she had impressed upon him the unconscious ambition to make another such woman the centre of his own home. The numerous tender services, the exquisite maternal thoughtfulness of this little mother-woman, had been built up by him into a protection and a load-star. Betty came — a girl in whom he recognized at once another mother — and she just touched his heart with her finger and walked straight in, fitting into the place which had been kept for her like a diamond into its setting.

Poor dear old Peter! No one would have thought, who looked at him sitting there in his big awkwardness

and incoherence, that he was a man in love, although a psychologist or even an ordinarily observant girl could very easily have told how Betty felt.

"Topping, isn't it?" he said.

"Simply wonderful," she replied.

"Tired?"

"Not a bit."

"Pretty good floor, eh?"

"Perfectly splendid."

"Gee! I shall miss this place."

"Why, of course you will."

"All the same, I shall be mighty keen to get at things,— and begin."

"Yes, of course you will."

"How do you know?"

"Oh, that's easy."

"Is it? How?"

"Well, don't I know you?"

"Do you? I wish you did."

Up in the branches something stirred. It may have been Cupid — probably it was.

But silence followed this conversational effort — a silence broken by a great heaving sigh, mostly of excitement, and the strains of the band which drifted out of the windows of the College Hall.

And over them both, as over all other men and women, young and old, at the beginning and at the end, hung the moon and the stars.

How good it is to be young and in love!

VI

Unnoticed by Mrs. Guthrie and her two boys, there was something more than a little pathetic in the Doctor's eager, wistful attitude toward the rather thoughtless, high-spirited, seething youth in the middle of which he found himself for the first time.

This man had never been young. The atmosphere of the farm on which he had been born killed youth as foul air kills a caged bird. Poverty, sordidness and the grim, constant struggle to live made his childhood and early days utterly devoid of the good sweet things. His mother, worn out and dispirited, died in giving him birth, and his father, bitter, lonely and filled with the irony that comes from a long and unprofitable hand-to-hand fight with mother-earth, let him bring himself up. He was turned out to work at a time when most lads are sent to school. He had to trudge daily into the straggling, one-eyed town, at an early hour, to report at the chemist's store where he obtained employment as an errand boy. Most of the small wages he earned were required by his father. From almost the very beginning life was to him a sort of whirling stream into which he had been flung before having been taught to swim. Mere self-preservation demanded that he should keep himself afloat. He picked up education as a stray dog picks up an occasional bone. There was, however, great grit in this boy and deep down in his soul an ambition to become something better than his father, whose daily wrestle

with nature — the most relentless of task-mistresses — had warped his character and stultified his soul. Young Hunter shuddered at the thought of living always on the farm, of grubbing in the earth, of planting and hoeing and reaping, of facing the almost inevitable tragedy of spoiled crops and ruined hopes, and the yearly set-backs of advancing freights and higher wages. He looked with growing horror and detestation at the farm implements among which his father spent his life; and while he ran his errands, carrying medicines and soda syphons, he nursed a dream in his little cold heart, which grew out of the smell of medicines and the talk of illness that was all about him in the chemist store. It was to become a doctor and tend the needs of humanity and, if it was in his power, to save to other children the mothers who brought them into being.

No wonder Dr. Hunter Guthrie wore strong glasses over his short-sighted eyes. At all times, with a sort of greed and an almost terrible eagerness, he read every medical book on which he could lay his hands,— in bed by the light of one candle, in the cubby-hole at the back of the store under the glare of the unshaded electric bulb, in trolley-cars and trains, and on the stoop of the shabby farmhouse so long as the light lasted. Later, after his day's work, he attended night classes, and even as he walked from the farm to the town he read. Spending sleepless nights and living laborious days he followed the example of many other brave and determined boys whose names gleam like beacons in the history of their country. He worked

his way through the necessary stages until finally, after a struggle so relentless that it nearly broke his health, he became a qualified doctor. In order to earn the money for his courses he was at different times bell-boy in a country hotel, an advertisement writer in a manufacturer's office, a clerk for a real-estate man and a traveling salesman for safety razors. His vacations were more arduous than his terms, and during these he earned the money with which to pay his college expenses. Every step up the ladder of innumerable rungs — which sometimes seemed to him impossible to climb — was painful and difficult. So much concentration was needed from the very beginning — so much condensed determination and energy required — that at the age of twenty-five he seemed to have lived twice that number of years. No wonder then that the all-conquering youthfulness of all the undergraduates amongst whom he found himself at Oxford awoke a sort of envy in his heart and startled him who had never been young. There was no meanness, jealousy or sense of martyrism in his feelings as he watched the kaleidoscopic picture of university life — only a sort of wonder and amazement that there were men in the world so lucky — so indescribably fortunate as to be able to carry boyhood and all its joys forward to an age when he had forgotten that such a period existed. Many times during those interesting and stirring days he stopped suddenly and thanked his God that he had been able to do for his own boys those things which no one had ever done for him, and give them such a chance in life as he had never had. Ac-

tually to see Peter, his eldest boy, proving his muscular strength and his mental ability and moving among his fellows with such splendid popularity, filled him with pride and gladness. Here indeed was a very concrete evidence of his reward for that long, arduous struggle.

Like most men who have concentrated upon one thing, Dr. Guthrie was a child when it came to others. Athleticism, of which he knew nothing, filled him with admiration. The knack of conversation amazed him. Even to his wife he found it difficult to talk. To force himself to confide was almost impossible — it was like blasting a rock. One afternoon however he got nearer to an intimate expression of his feelings than ever before — perhaps because he was still under the influence of the intoxication of the youthfulness all about him.

Kenyon had driven them out after tea to Shotover Hill. All the young people had gone on to Cuddesden, leaving the doctor and his wife to sit and look down into the valley far below in which nestled the town and all its colleges and spires. It had been a golden day and the sun was setting with all the dignity and pomp of early summer, making the thin line of the Thames shine like a winding silver ribbon. There was something of exultation over the earth that evening and of untranslatable beauty, and the evening song of the birds was like that of choristers in a great cathedral.

Unusual words seethed in the doctor's head. He was moved and thrilled. The rest and the relief of leaving his work, all the bustle and stir of the new life

in which he was a temporary figure, seemed to take him back to his own early days when, with the little woman who sat by his side, he had stood with her in their first house, newly married.

He took his hat off, put his arm round the shoulders of that faithful woman and kissed her cheek with a touch of passion and gratitude. "My darling," he said, "I wish I could say properly some of the things that I feel about you and my children and the goodness of God. There are tears in my heart, and strange feelings. I feel oddly young and strong. I want to laugh and cry. I'd like to pick wild flowers and make a little crown for your head. Don't laugh at me — please don't laugh."

The little woman took his thin hand and pressed it to her cheek. "I laugh because that is how I feel, too," she said,—"young and glad and very happy to see my big Peter doing such wonderful things, and still a boy. Dear old man, we have much to be thankful for! I know how you've worked and striven,—and how fine it is to see some of the results of it. I was a little afraid before we came here that we might find Peter different — altered — perhaps older — but he's just the same. He's exactly like you."

The Doctor shook his head and a sudden pain twisted his thin, studious face. "Oh no, no," he said, "I was never like that. I wish to God I had been. But it was to make Peter what he is that I've worked night and day. He's my idea of a man. He's doing all the things that I'd like to have done. He's me as I might have been if I'd had any luck — any sort of

a chance. Do I regret it? Am I jealous? No; because if I hadn't lived such an opposite life I mightn't have desired to give my boy all this." He waved his hand towards the spires that rose in all their significance out of the town away below. And then, with intense eagerness and a ring of wistfulness in his voice that brought tears to his wife's eyes, he bent towards her. "Do you think he realizes this, Mary? Does Graham ever stop to think how hard I've worked to put him in Wall Street? Does Belle ever wonder what it's cost me in youth and health to give her so much more than she needs? I'm — I'm a queer, wordless, foolishly shy man. Old since the time they all three began to think and use their eyes,— necessarily concentrated and aloof away in that laboratory of mine, and — and sometimes I wonder whether my children know me and understand and make allowances. Do they, Mary, my dear one? Do they?"

"Yes, my man, my brave and splendid man," she replied, "they do, they do!" And in saying this she deliberately lied,— out of her great and steadfast love for this man of hers she lied.

No one knew so well as she did that the father of her children might almost as well be a mere distant relation who lived in their home for reasons of convenience and allotted money to their requirements at the proper time. No one knew so well as she did that Hunter Guthrie's tragic lack of childhood had dried out of his nature the power of understanding children. Never having been a child in any sense of the word — never having known the inexpressible joy of a moth-

er's love — remembering nothing but a father who was either working hard or tired out — he was unable to conceive what his own children needed in addition to all that they got hourly from his wife and from his own work. It had always seemed to him that in the possession of a mother they had everything good that God could give them. It seemed to him that his own part was performed by providing for their needs. No man desired to be the father of sons and daughters more than he did. No man was prouder in the possession of them than he was and had always been. To hear the patter of their little feet about his house sent him to his work with that sense of religion of which Carlyle wrote. To watch them shaping from childhood into youth was the most satisfactory and beautiful thing in his life. To be able, year after year, to do better and still better for them was his best and biggest reward — far greater and more glorious than the distinction he earned for himself and the international reputation that increased with each of his discoveries. And when, six months after Peter had left home to go to Oxford with a Rhodes scholarship, he found himself unexpectedly endowed to the extent of over three million dollars under the will of a late wealthy patient, so that he might, in the old man's own words, "devote himself, without the fret and fever of earning a livelihood as a practitioner, to the noble and limitless work of a bacteriologist for the benefit of suffering humanity all over the world," it was for the sake of his children that he offered up thanks. With what immense pride he notified the

authorities at Harvard that his son was independent of the scholarship, which was free to send another man to Oxford. With what keen pleasure he was able to buy Graham a seat on the Stock Exchange, bring Belle out as a débutante and send his little Ethel to the best possible school. These things he could do, and did, but he could not and had never been able to do for them a better thing than all these,— win their confidence, their deep affection and their friendship. That gift had been killed in him. It could not be acquired, taught or purchased, and he had always been as much out of touch with his boys and girls as though he were divided from them by a great stone wall. It had always been with them, "Look out! Here's father!" instead of "Hello! Here's Dad!" His entrance into their playroom was the signal for silence. The sight of his studious face and short-sighted eyes and distrait, shy manner chilled them and reduced them to quietude and self-consciousness and suspicion. If he had treated them always as human beings, played with them, sat on the floor and built houses with their bricks, thrown open the door of his study to them, if only for half an hour every day, so that there might be no possibility of its becoming a Blue Room; if he had, as they grew into the habit of thinking and observing and remembering, told them about himself and his own boyhood and in this way inculcated a mutual interest, a desire to respond and open out; if, before the two boys had gone to college he had had the courage to act on the earnest advice of a friend and speak to them on the vital question of sex, give

them the truth as he so well knew it and warn them bravely and rightly of the inevitable pitfalls that lined their youthful path, no brick wall would have existed and he would have been their pal as well as their father,— a combination altogether irresistible.

As it was Hunter Guthrie's wife, who loved him deeply and devotedly and recognized in him a great man as well as a most unselfish father, was obliged to lie in reply to his questions. She would rather have died, then and there, than hurt him and bring down his house about his ears. The sad and tragic part of it all was that she knew utterly that no good, no change could be brought about by telling the truth. It was too late.

VII

Belle had told Betty that she was "crazy" about Nicholas Kenyon. There is usually a wildness of exaggeration about this expression which renders it almost harmless. The exuberant type of girl who uses it applies it with equal thoughtlessness to a new hat, a new play or a new set of furs. She will be crazy about a tenor and a pomeranian, a so-called joke in a comic paper and the sermon of a fashionable preacher. In regard to Kenyon, however, Belle was really and truly crazy in its most accurate dictionary sense. After the Worcester Ball, during which she gave him nearly every dance,— to the flustered concern of the Don's wife who was her chaperon,— she went to no trouble to conceal from Kenyon the fact that she found

him vastly attractive. Kenyon was not surprised. Already he was a complete expert in the art of making himself loved by women. He knew exactly what they liked him to say and he said it with a touch of insolence which took their breath away and a following touch of deference which gave them back their self-respect. Belle was very much to his liking. Her rather Latin beauty, which was rendered unexplainable by the sight of her parents — her incessant high spirits and love of life — her naïve assumption that she was the mistress of all the secrets of this world, amused, interested and tickled his fancy. Her beauty, freshness and youth pleased him as an epicure, and he went out of his way to be with her as much as he could. He had no intention whatever of falling in love with her, — first of all because it was all against his creed to fall in love with anyone but himself; secondly, because his way of living demanded that he should have no partner in his business,— all that he could win by his wits he would need. Nevertheless, he was quite as ready as usual to take everything that was given to him, and give nothing in return except flattery, well-rounded sentences and a good deal of his personal attention.

During the week that passed so quickly he had only been able to see Belle with her people, and when he found that this bored her as much as it bored him, he set his brain to work to devise some plan by which he could escape with her from the party for a few hours. Needless to say he succeeded.

On the night before the party were to leave Oxford

he arranged another evening trip on the river, maneuvred Peter into one punt with his father and mother, Graham and Betty, and got into another with Belle. For some little time he poled along closely behind them, but as the river was full of similar parties he found it easy to drop behind and dodge deftly into a back water. Here he tied up to a branch, set himself down on the cushions at Belle's side and lit a cigarette.

"How's that?" he asked.

Belle laughed a little excitedly. "Very clever," she said. "I wondered how you were going to do it."

He didn't find it necessary to tell her that he had performed a similar trick a hundred times. "Under the right sort of inspiration," he said, "even I can develop genius. Tell me something about New York, and what you find to do there."

"I should have to talk from now until to-morrow morning even to begin to tell you," she said. "I only came out last winter, but the history of it would fill a book. New York is some town and I guess a girl has a better time there than anywhere else in the world. Why don't you come and see something of it for yourself?"

Kenyon leaned lightly against the girl's soft shoulder. "That's precisely what I'm going to do," he said. "Your father has given me a cordial invitation to stay at his house, and I shall go over with Peter in October."

"Oh, isn't that fine!" cried Belle. "You'll love the place — it's so different."

"I'm not worrying about the place," said Kenyon. "I'm simply going for the chance of dancing with you to the band which really does know how to play rag-time. It'll be worth crossing three thousand miles of unnecessary water to achieve that alone."

"I don't believe you," said Belle; but all her teeth gleamed in the moonlight and her heart pumped a little. How wonderful it would be to become the wife of the Honourable Nicholas Kenyon, who seemed to her to be everything that was desirable.

Kenyon picked up her hand and just touched it with his lips. "You don't believe it? Well, we'll see." He knew very well that if he had chosen to do so he could have kissed her lips, but his policy was to go slow. His epicurianism was so complete that he liked to take his enjoyment in sips and not empty his glass at a gulp. This girl whose imagined worldliness was so childlike was well worth all his attention. He looked forward with absolute certainty to the hour when he should place her on his little list of achievements; but like all collectors and connoisseurs he added to his pleasure by winning his point gradually, step by step, with a sort of cold-blooded passion.

Belle was accustomed to men who were a little crude in their naturalness and who immediately voiced their admiration and their liking with boyish spontaneity. She had strings of beaux of all ages who immediately sent her flowers and presents and dogged her heels from dance to dance and rang her up constantly on the telephone and generally showed their eagerness with that lack of control which was characteristic of a na-

tion which had deliberately placed women in the position of queens.

Perhaps it was because this man's methods were so different that she found him so attractive. He fed her vanity and piqued it at the same time. He said more by saying nothing than any man had ever ventured to do, and he retired so quickly after an amazing advance that he left her assuming more than if he had never advanced at all. It was perfectly natural, although she had already dipped into the fastest New York set, that she should believe that at the end of every man's intention there was a marriage and a sort of throne in his house. She little knew Nicholas Kenyon. She had had the good fortune to meet men in New York, and not collectors.

"What are your father's plans when he leaves Oxford?" asked Kenyon, leaning a little more closely against the girl's soft shoulder.

"Why, we're going to Shakespeare's country, to the English lakes and then to Scotland, where father's ancestors lived; and then in August we shall go to London for a week, and go home on the *Olympic*. Why don't you go over with us?"

"I should like nothing better," said Kenyon, "but as a matter of fact I shall wait until Peter has got through his various engagements. He rows at Henley in July, you know,— the boat is entered for the Lady's Plate,— and then he comes home with me. He wants to shoot my father's birds in August and see a little of English country life before he settles down to his law work in America."

Belle was silent for a few moments. She wished that this wonderful week could be extended over the whole of her holidays. She knew, and was really a little frightened at knowing, that when she left Oxford the next day she would leave behind her a heart that had hitherto been quite untouched. She was amazed and even a little annoyed to find that a mere week had brought about such a revolution in all her feelings and in her whole outlook on life. She had meant to have a perfectly wonderful time before falling in love.

"I suppose," she said, "that we shan't hear anything of you until we see you again, unless,— unless you write sometimes to mother and tell her how you are and what Peter is doing."

Kenyon didn't even smile. "Peter will write to your mother once a week, as usual — he's very consistent — and I'll get him to put in a postscript about me, if you like. I shall have some difficulty in preventing myself from writing to you from time to time, although I'm a child in the art of letter-writing."

"Why should you prevent it? I should simply love to have your letters."

"But isn't your mother a little old-fashioned?"

"Maybe," said Belle, "but does that matter? You've not met any American girls before — that's easy to see. We do just what we like, and if our mothers don't agree they don't dare to say so. Shall I tell you why? Because it wouldn't make any difference if they did."

"Then I shall write," said Kenyon, "and give you

brief but eloquent descriptions of English weather, English politics and the condition of my liver,—that is to say, the three inevitable topics of this country."

Belle laughed. "Then it will be perfectly safe for me to leave your letters about," she said.

"Perfectly,—always supposing that you censor the postscripts."

"I'm crazy about you!" said Belle; and this time her laugh awoke the echoes of the river and filled a nightingale near by with a pathetic ambition to emulate its music.

And then they heard Peter's great voice shouting, "N-i-c-k!" Whereupon Kenyon gathered himself together, not unpleased at being disturbed, stood up gracefully and pulled back into the main stream. "The call of duty," he said—"such is life." It was consistent with his policy to conduct this most pleasant affair by instalments.

When he saw the other punt he asked Peter, with a touch of beautiful petulance, why he had deliberately lost them, and turned a deaf ear to Graham's idiotic chuckle.

The landing stage was in the shadow, which was just as well. When Kenyon gave his hand to Belle to help her out of the punt, he drew her close against him and with a touch of passion as unexpected as the sudden flash of a searchlight across a dark sky left a kiss on her lips that took her breath away.

All the way back to the hotel she hung on Peter's arm and dared not trust herself to speak. For the first time in her young life she had caught a glimpse

of its meaning. It left her strangely moved and thrilled.

Little Mrs. Guthrie walked back with Kenyon, very proud of the fact that he was Peter's friend.

Poor little mother!

VIII

On the steps of the Randolph Hotel, Mrs. Guthrie turned to Kenyon and asked him, with one of her most motherly smiles, to have some supper with them. Telegraphing quickly to Peter and Graham that they were not to accept the invitation, Kenyon said: "Nothing would give me greater pleasure — absolutely nothing. Unfortunately Peter and I have already accepted an invitation from two of our Dons and we cannot possibly get out of this dull but profitable hour."

"How very disappointing!" said Mrs. Guthrie.

"How silly!" said Belle.

Betty merely said, "Oh!" but the rest of her sentence was condensed into one quick look at Peter.

Peter, utterly without guile, turned round to Nicholas Kenyon in blank amazement. "It's the first I've heard of it," he said. "What on earth do you mean? Two of the Dons? Who are they?"

But Kenyon was an artist and a strategist, and therefore a liar. "My dear old boy! What would you do without me? I'm your diary, your secretary, your guide, philosopher and friend. If you've forgotten the engagement I certainly haven't." And he

shot at Peter a swift and subtle wink, in which he included Graham.

Scenting adventure and gathering that the two Dons were in all probability coming from the chorus of "The Pirates of Penzance," Graham joined in quickly. "I suppose I can't come and listen humbly to the learned conversation of these two professors?"

"But why not?" said Kenyon. "No doubt you can tell them more about Wall Street in five minutes than they would ever learn in their lives. Therefore, dear Mrs. Guthrie, I'm afraid we must all say 'good-night.' We'll rejoin you in the morning for breakfast as arranged, and wind up what's been the pleasantest week of my life, by driving out to Woodstock for lunch."

It was all done in the most masterly manner, and when the three men left the hotel arm in arm they were not guided by Kenyon toward St. Giles, but to the theatre, where the curtain was just about to fall with the last act.

"What's all this?" asked Peter, impatiently. "Mother had set her heart upon having us to supper."

"Mother has had us all day," replied Kenyon. "Bear in mind the fact that there are other women in the world to whom we owe a little gallantry. You and Graham are going to eat Welsh Rabbit at the somewhat humble rooms of my little friends, Lottie Lawrence and Billy Seymour."

"I'll see you damned first!" said Peter. "I've no use for these people. Come on, Graham, let's go back."

Kenyon's face was wreathed in smiles. "It can't

be done, dear lad," he said. "Your mother would be the last person on earth to permit you to be discourteous to our two distinguished Dons, and by this time in all human probability Betty will be preparing for bed."

Peter had been building all his hopes on another hour with Betty. She was leaving Oxford with his people the next afternoon and he wanted above all things, however incoherently, to let her know something of the state of his feelings. He had never been so angry with Kenyon before. "Curse you!" he said. "You've spoiled everything. If you must play about with these chorus girls why can't you do it alone? Why drag me in?"

Kenyon's eyes narrowed. "Only the angels die young, Peter, my friend," he said. "As I've been obliged to tell you before, you stand a pretty good chance of an early demise. Have you ever heard the word 'priggish'? For a whole week I've played the game by you and devoted myself, lock, stock and barrel, to your family. Mere sportsmanship demands that you make some slight return to me by joining my little party to-night. Don't you agree with me, Graham?"

Graham's vanity was vastly appealed to by the fact that this perfect man of the world had taken him into his intimacy. Hitherto he hadn't met English chorus girls. He rather liked the idea. "Why," he said, "I can't see why we shouldn't go. I'm with you, anyway. Come on, Peter. Be a sport."

But Peter held his ground. He had all the more

reason for so doing because he had met Betty. "All right!" he said. "You two can do what you jolly well like. Cut me out of it. I shall turn in. If that's being priggish — fine. Good-night!"

He wheeled round and marched off, and as he passed beneath the windows of the Randolph Hotel he drew up short for a moment and with a touch of knightliness which was quite unself-conscious he bared his head beneath the window of the room in which be believed that Betty was to sleep, but which, as a matter of fact, harboured a short, fat, wheezy Anglo-Indian with a head as bald as a billiard ball.

Kenyon disguised his annoyance under an air of characteristic imperturbability. "Well, that's our Peter to the life," he said, taking Graham's eager arm. "He's a sort of Don Quixote — a very pure and perfect person. One of these days he's likely to come an unholy cropper, and that's to my way of thinking what he most needs. I don't agree with a man's being a total abstainer in anything. It narrows him and makes him provincial. Then, too, a man who fancies himself as better than his fellows is apt to wear a halo under his hat, and that disgusting trick ruins friendship and leads to a hasty and ill-considered marriage with the first good actress who catches him on the hop and makes use of his lamentable ignorance. Come along, brother, we'll see life together."

"Fine!" said Graham. "Me for life all the time."

So these two,— the one curiously old and the other dangerously young,— made their way to the stage door

of the Theatre Royal and waited among the little crowd of undergraduates for the moment when the ladies of the chorus should have retouched their make-up and be ready for further theatricalisms.

Lottie Lawrence and Billy Seymour were the first out. The latter's greeting was exuberant. "What-ho, Nick! Where's the blooming giant you said you were going to bring?"

"Otherwise engaged, dear Billy; but permit me to introduce to you a financial magnate from the golden city of New York."

Billy was young and slim and so tight-skirted that her walk was almost like that of a Chinese Princess. Even under the modest light of the stage door-keeper's box her lips gleamed crimsonly and her long eyelashes stuck out separately in black surprise. Her small round face was plastered thickly with powder. She was very alluring to the very young. Her friend had come from an exactly similar mould and might have been a twin but for her manner, which was that of the violet — the modest violet — on a river's brim.

Kenyon hailed a cab, gave the man the address in Wellington Square and sat himself between the two girls, with an arm round each.

Billy Seymour had taken in Graham with one expert glance of minute examination. "Graham Guthrie, eh?" she said. "It smacks of Caledonia, bag-pipes and the braes and banks o' bonnie Doon. I take it your ancestors went over on the S. S. Mayflower, of the White Star Line — that gigantic vessel which followed the beckoning finger of Columbus — and started

the race which invented sky-scrapers and the cuspidors."

Graham let out a howl of laughter and told himself that he was in for a good evening, especially as the ladies' knees were very friendly.

Lottie Lawrence placed her head on Kenyon's shoulder, sighed a little and said: "Oh, I'm so tired and so hungry; and I've a thirst I wouldn't sell for a tenner."

Kenyon tightened his hold. "All those things shall be remedied, little one," he said. "Have no fear."

The first things which met their eyes when they entered the sitting-room of the sordid little house in which a series of theatricals had lodged from time immemorial, were a half-dozen bottles of champagne — sent in by Nick's order. The two girls showed their appreciation for his tactfulness in different ways. Billy fell upon one of the bottles as though it were her long-lost sister, pressed it to her bosom and placed a passionate kiss upon its label; while Lottie, with an eloquent gesture, immediately handed Graham a rather battered corkscrew. "Help me to the bubbly, boy," she said. "My throat is like a limekiln."

All the clocks of the City of Spires were striking three as Kenyon and Graham supported each other out into the quiet and deserted street. There was much powder on Graham's coat and a patch of crimson on Kenyon's left cheek.

"Life with a big L, Graham, my boy," said Kenyon a little thickly.

"A hell of a big L," said Graham, with a very much too loud laugh at his feeble joke. "You certainly do know your way about."

"And most of the short cuts," said Kenyon dryly. "Presently I shall scale the wall of St. John's, climb through the window of one of our fellows who's about to take holy orders, and wind up the night in the hospitable arms of Morpheus." This eventually Graham watched him do, with infinite delight, and was still wearing a smile of self-congratulation as he passed the door of his mother's bedroom in the hotel and entered his own.

His father heard the heavy footsteps as they went along the passage, but imagined that they were those of the night watchman on his rounds.

Fate is the master of irony.

IX

THE following morning at eight o'clock Peter, as fit as a fiddle, stalked into Kenyon's bedroom and flung up the blind. The sun poured in through the open window. Innumerable sparrows twittered among the trees in the gardens and scouts were moving energetically about the quad. From the other windows the sounds of renewed life were coming. The great beehive of a college was about to begin a new and strenuous day.

Kenyon was sleeping heavily with a blanket drawn about his ears. His clothes were all over the floor

and a tumbler one-fourth filled with whiskey stood on the dressing-table among a large collection of ivory-backed brushes, links, studs, tie-pins and other paraphernalia which belong to men of Kenyon's type,— the bloods of Oxford. With a chuckle, Peter dipped a large sponge in the water of the hip-bath which had been placed ready on the floor, and throwing back the blanket squeezed its contents all over Kenyon's well-cut face.

The effect was instantaneous. The sleeper awoke, and cursed. Peter's howl of laughter at the sight of this pale blinking man with his delicate blue silk pajamas all wet round the neck advertised the fact to the whole college that he was up and about.

Kenyon got slowly out of bed. "There are fools — damned fools — and Peter Guthrie," he said quietly. "What's the time?"

"Time for you to get up, shave and bathe, if you want to breakfast at the Randolph. How late were you last night?"

"Haven't a notion," said Kenyon. "The first faint touch of dawn was coming over the horizon, so far as I remember, when your little brother watched me climb through the window of the man Rivers, upon whose 'tummie' I planted my foot. For a man who's about to enter the Church he has an astounding vocabulary of gutter English. You look abominably fit, old boy — the simple life, eh? Heigh-ho! — Manipulate this machine for me while I'm doing my hair." He picked up the small black case of his safety-razor and threw it at Peter, who caught it.

Then he got into a very beautiful silk dressing-gown, stuck his feet into a pair of heelless red morocco slippers, and with infinite pains and accuracy made a centre parting in his fair hair, in which there was a slight natural curl.

From his comfortable position on the foot of the bed Peter watched his friend shave,— a performance through which he went with characteristic neatness. It was a very different performance from the one through which Peter was in the habit of going. Soap flew all round this untidy man, giving the scout much extra work in his cleaning-up process.

Kenyon didn't intend to enter into any details as to the orgy of the night before. He knew from previous experience that Peter's sympathy was not with him. For many reasons he desired to stand well with his friend, especially looking to the fact that he needed an immediate loan. One or two of his numerous creditors were pressing for part payment. So he let the matter drop and took the opportunity to talk like a father to Peter on another point which had grown out of the visit of his people. "Tell me," he said, "what is precisely the state of your feelings in regard to your sister's friend? It seems to me that you're getting a bit sloppy in that direction. Am I right?"

"No," said Peter, "'sloppy' isn't the word."

"Oh! Well, then, what is the word? I may be able to advise you."

"I don't want your advice," said Peter. "My mind is made up."

Kenyon turned round. "Is that so? Quick work."

Peter nodded. "It's always quick when it's inevitable."

"Oho! What have we here — romance?"

"Yes; I think so," said Peter quietly.

"Who'd have thought it? Our friend Peter has met his soul-mate! Out of the great crowd he has chosen the mother of his children. It is to laugh!"

"Think so?" said Peter. "I don't."

Kenyon put down his razor and stood in front of the man with whom he had lived for several years and who had now apparently come up against a big moment in his life. It didn't suit him that Peter should be seriously in love yet. He looked to his friend to provide him with a certain amount of leisure in the future. His plans would all go wrong if he had to share him with someone else. He had imagined that his friend was only temporarily gone on this little girl whose brief entry into Oxford had helped to make Eight's week very pleasant. It was his duty to find out exactly how Peter stood.

"Do you mean to tell me," he asked, "that you've proposed to Betty Townsend?"

"Not yet," said Peter, "but I'm going to this morning — that is if I have the pluck."

"My dear fellow," said Kenyon, with a genuine earnestness, "don't do it. I've no doubt she'll jump at you, being under the influence of this place and seeing you as a small hero here; but take the advice

of a man who knows and bring caution to your rescue. What'll happen if you tie yourself up to this girl? After all, you can't possibly be in love with her — that's silly. You're under the influence of a few silver nights, and that most dangerous of all things — propinquity. Dally with her of course, kiss her and write her letters in which you quote the soft stuff of the poets. That'll provide you with much quiet amusement and assist you in the acquisition of a literary style; but, for God's sake, don't be serious. You're too young. You've not sown your wild oats. What's the use of taking a load of responsibility on your shoulders before you're obliged to do so? I'm talking to you like a father, old man, and I've the right."

"Oh yes," said Peter, "you've the right — no man better — but you and I look at things differently. I want the responsibility of this girl. I want someone to work for,— an impetus — an ultimate end. It may seem idiotic to you that I know the right girl directly I see her, but all the same it's a fact. You see my undergraduate days are almost over. When I go home in the fall I shall start earning my living. What am I going to work for? A home, of course, and a wife and all that that means. If that's what you call romance, thank you, it's exactly what I want. Do you get me?"

Kenyon shrugged his shoulders. "Then I don't see that there's anything more to be said. Does all this mean that you're going to chuck me? Supposing Betty accepts you? Are you going to dog her foot-

steps for the rest of the summer and leave me in the cart?"

"Oh Lord, no!" said Peter.

"Thank God for small mercies! And now if you'll give me a little elbow-room I'll have my bath."

"Right-o!" said Peter. "Buck up! Breakfast at nine o'clock."

He went out, not singing as usual but with a curious quietness and a strange light dancing in his eyes.

Kenyon was left the sole master of that little bedroom. As he finished dressing he marshalled his thoughts and into them entered the figure of a certain very beautiful person who lived in a cottage on the borders of his father's estate. Before now she had twisted young men, quite as romantic as Peter, out of their engagements to simple little girls. He would see that she worked her wiles on Peter. He didn't intend that his friend should devote himself to any person except Nicholas Kenyon so long as he could prevent it.

X

It was a rather curious meal,— this final breakfast at the Randolph Hotel. There were several undercurrents of feeling which seemed to disturb the atmosphere like cross winds. The Doctor and Mrs. Guthrie were genuinely sorry that the week had come to an end. It was one which would be filled with memories. Graham would very willingly have remained at

Oxford as long as Kenyon did. He had fallen a complete victim to the attractions of this master of psychology. He regarded him as the very last word in expert worldliness. He paid him the highest tribute that he considered it was possible for one man to pay another, by calling him "a good sport," and he looked forward with enormous pleasure to the time when he would be able to show Kenyon the night side of New York, with which he had himself begun to be well acquainted.

As to the two girls, wonderful things had happened to both of them during that emotional, stirring, picturesque and altogether "different" week. It seemed almost incredible to them they had been in that old town for so short a time, during which, however, their little plans — their girlish point of view — had undergone absolute revolution. The high-spirited Belle, who had hitherto gone through life with a consistent exuberance and rather thoughtless joy, was rendered uncharacteristically serious at the knowledge that she would not see Nicholas Kenyon again for some months. Not for a moment did she regret the fact that she had fallen badly in love with him. It was a new sensation for her, and young as she was, it was the new thing that counted. Her mind was filled with dreams. In imagination she walked from one series of pictures into another and all were touched with excitement, exhilaration and a sense of having won something, the possession of which all her friends would envy her.

In going over in her mind all that Kenyon had said

to her, she could not put her finger on any actual declaration on his part; but his subtle assumption of possession, the way in which he touched her hand and looked at her over other people's heads with eyes which seemed to embrace her, seemed to her to be far more satisfactory than any conventional set of words ordinary under such circumstances. Then, too, there was that wonderful and sudden kiss on the landing stage in the shadow. Why, there was no doubt about it. She had, like Cæsar, come and seen and conquered. She was to be the Hon. Mrs. Nicholas Kenyon, daughter-in-law of Lord Shropshire, of Thrapstone-Wynyates. What a delightful surprise for father and mother, and how proud they would be of her!

Betty knew that Peter intended to make her his wife. She knew it and was happy. His very incoherence had been more eloquent to her than the well-rounded sentences of all the heroes of her favorite novels, and if he never said another word before she left, she would be satisfied. In her heart there was the sensation of one who had come to the end of a long road and now stood in a great wide open space on which the sun fell warmly and with great beauty.

Not much was said by anyone, and the question of the afternoon train which was to leave at four-thirty was consistently avoided by them all.

Breakfast over, the whole party followed Kenyon into the street, where two cars were waiting for the trip to Woodstock. They were to lunch at the old inn which stood beneath the gnarled branches of the oaks that had sheltered the Round Heads and Royalists.

The first car was Kenyon's roadster, in which he placed Mrs. Guthrie, the Doctor and Graham. He had intended that Betty should sit by his side as he drove, and that Peter should take Belle in his two-seater. But Master Peter was too quick for him this time. He had touched Betty on the arm and said: "You're coming with me." And before Kenyon could frame a sentence to break up this arrangement these two were off together with the complete disregard for speed limits which was peculiar to the Oxford undergraduate. Kenyon had the honesty to say about this to himself that it was well done, but all the same he was immensely annoyed. As he drove off with Belle on the front seat he was not, for at least a mile, a very talkative companion. Belle put his silence down to the fact that she was going away that afternoon.

Along St. Giles, past the burial ground, the Roman Catholic Church, Somerville, and into the Woodstock road as far as the Radcliffe Infirmary, Peter kept the lead, and then the big car overtook him and left him behind. Graham waved his hand and shouted something which Peter didn't catch. It was probably facetious. As far as Wolvercote Peter kept in touch with the car in front, when he began to fall gradually behind. He had a plan in the back of his head.

The morning seemed to suit all that he had to say, if he found himself able to say it. The earth was warm with the sun. The hedges and trees were still in the first fresh vigor of early summer. Everywhere birds sang and were busy with their young.

Peter pulled up short at the edge of a spinney.

"Let's get out of here," he said, "I want to show you a corking little bit of country." And Betty obeyed without a word. She rather liked being ordered about by this big square-shouldered person.

They didn't go far,— hardly, in fact, fifty yards from the car,— and when they came to a small opening among the beeches where bracken grew and "bread and cheese" covered the soft turf with their little yellow heads, Peter said: "Sit down; I want to speak to you."

And again Betty obeyed without a word. It was coming — she knew that it was coming — and the only thing she was afraid about was that Peter would hear the quick beat of her heart.

He laid himself full stretch at her feet, threw off his cap and ran his fingers through his hair. "You know this place," he said.

"I? No, I've never been here before."

"Yes, you have. You've been here with your friends. They come out every night from the first of May until the first of October. Can't you see the marks their feet have made as they danced here in the ring? It's awfully queer. This is the first place I came to after I got to Oxford — all the leaves were red — and I sat here one afternoon alone and wondered how long it would be before I should look up and see you. I've often come here since, winter and summer, and listened for sticks to crackle as you came along through the trees to find me. Why don't you laugh?"

"Why should I?"

"I knew you wouldn't. If you had it wouldn't have been you."

He turned himself round on to his elbows and looked up at her, and remained looking and looking. And Betty looked back. Her heart was beating so loudly that it seemed to her that someone was whacking a carpet somewhere with a stick. She wondered whether she would be able to hear Peter when he spoke again,— if ever he did.

And Peter said: "I'm going to begin to be a man exactly five months from to-day. That is to say, I'm going into a law office in New York to make a beginning. I'm going to work like the dickens. Do you know why?"

Betty shook her head and then nodded. He was a long time coming to the point. If he wasn't quick she'd simply have to scream. Her heart was up in her throat — it was most uncomfortable.

Peter went on. Somehow words came easy to him. The earth was so friendly and so motherly and so very kind, and after all this was his spot and she was there at last. "I forget the number of the house," he said, "but up on the eighth floor of it, facing south, there's a most corking apartment. The rooms are large and can be filled with big furniture and enormous bookcases. I'm going to work to get that. I don't know how long it'll take, but I'm going to ask you to help me to get it. Will you?"

Betty nodded again. Someone was beating the carpet in a most violent manner.

Peter, without another word, sprang up, put two

large strong hands under Betty's elbows and set her on her feet. She came up to the top button of his coat and he held her there tight and it hurt her cheek. But oh, how fine and broad the chest was behind it and how good it was to nestle there. She heard him say much that she forgot then, but remembered afterwards — simple boyish things expressed with deep sincerity and a sort of throb — outpourings of pent-up feelings — not in the very least incoherent, but all definite and very good. And there they stayed for what appeared to be a long time. The man with the carpet had gone away, but without looking up Betty knew that there were hundreds of little people dancing around them in the ring and the little clearing full of the yellow heads of wild flowers seemed to have become that great open space and out of it, between an avenue of old trees, stretched the wide road which led to,— the word was the only one in the song that filled her brain,— motherhood! Motherhood!

A rabbit ran past them frightened, and Betty sprang away. "Peter! What will the others say?"

Peter shook himself and his great laugh awoke the echoes of the woods. "I don't care what anybody says," he answered. "Do you?"

"Yes. Let's go. We shall be late for lunch."

And Peter picked her up, carried her to the car, kissed her, put her in, and drove away.

XI

Peter and Kenyon left the station arm in arm. They had watched the train round the corner and disappear. Many hands had waved to the crowd of undergraduates who had come to see their people and friends off. Peter had stood bareheaded with his hand still tingling with the touch of Betty's.

They walked slowly back to college, each busy with his thoughts. Exultation filled Peter's mind. Kenyon was wondering how much he could touch Peter for. In the procession of returning undergraduates they made their way under the railway bridge and along the sun-bathed but rather slummy cobblestone road over which the tram-cars ran. They passed the row of little red brick houses — most of which were shops — and the factory, stammering smoke, and turned into the back way which led by a short cut to Worcester.

Oxford had resumed her normal atmosphere. Fathers and mothers, uncles, guardians, brothers, sisters and cousins, who had all descended upon the town, had departed. No longer were the old winding streets set alight by the many colored frocks of pretty girls, nor were they any longer stirred into a temporary bustle by the great influx of motor-cars. Undergraduates held possession once more and with their peculiar adaptability were making hasty preparations for the long vacation.

Peter led the way to his sitter, loaded his inevitable

pipe, and sat in the sun on the sill of the open window. With fastidious care Kenyon stuck a cigarette into a long meerschaum holder and laid himself down on the settee. He had worked very hard during the week and had very much more than carried out his promise to Peter to make himself pleasant. The moment had come when he might certainly lead the way up to his reward.

Peter took the words out of his friend's mouth. "What d'you think?" he said. "When I was saying good-bye to the Governor on the platform he took me aside and gave me a cheque. He did it in his curious apologetic way which always makes me feel that he's someone else's father, and said: 'I think this will see you through for a month or two.' Gee! It's some cheque, Nick! I don't think I shall have to touch the old man down for another bob until I have to book my passage. His generosity leaves me wordless. I wish to God I'd been able to say something nice. As it was, I had to tell mother to thank him for me." He went over to his desk, fished out a cheque-book, sat down and made one out in his large round boyish handwriting.

Kenyon watched him intently. He hoped that it might be for himself and for fifty sovereigns. That amount, carefully split up, would keep some of his more pressing tradesmen quiet for a short time.

"Is this any good to you, old man?" said Peter. He dropped the cheque on to Kenyon's immaculate waistcoat. It was for a hundred pounds.

The master parasite was taken by surprise almost

for the first time in his life and he was sincerely touched by this generosity. "My dear old Peter! This is really devilish kind of you! I'm exceedingly grateful. My exit from Oxford can now be made with a certain amount of dignity. I'll add this amount to your other advances, and you must trust in God and my luck at cards to get it back."

"Oh, that's all right," said Peter. "You'd have done the same for me. What's the good of friendship anyway if a man can't share his bonuses with a pal? Well, well! There goes another Commem:— the last of them for us. Everything seems awfully flat here without,— without my people. What d'you think of the Governor?"

Kenyon folded the cheque neatly and slipped it into a small leather case upon which his crest was embossed in gold. It was one of the numerous nice things for which he owed. "Your father," he said, "is a very considerable man. I made a careful study of him and I've come to the conclusion that all he needs from you and Graham is human treatment. If he were my father I should buy a metaphorical chisel and an easily manipulated hammer and chip off all his shyness bit by bit as though it were concrete. Properly managed there's enough in Dr. Guthrie to keep you in comfort for the rest of your life without doing a stroke of work. What age is he — somewhere about fifty-three I suppose? In all human probability he is good — barring accidents — for another fifteen years or so. Then, duly mourned, and, I take it, considerably paragraphed in your newspapers, he will go

to his long rest and you will come into your own. With even quite ordinary diplomacy you can use those fifteen years to considerable advantage to yourself,— dallying gently with life and adding considerably to your experience, making your headquarters at his house. You can do the semblance of work in order to satisfy his rather puritanical notion,— but I can't see that there'll be any need for you to sweat. For instance, become a poet — that's easy. There are stacks of sonneteers whom you could imitate. Or you could call yourself a literary man and do nothing more than establish a sanctum-sanctorum in which to keep a neat pile of well-bound manuscript books and acquire a library. If I were you I should adopt the latter course — it sounds well. It'll satisfy the old man and all the while you're not writing the great book he'll pat himself on the back and congratulate himself on having had you properly educated. During all this time you can draw from him a very nice yearly income, and then make your splash when nature has laid her relentless hand upon the old man's shoulder."

There was a moment's pause, during which Peter looked very curiously at the graceful indolent man who lay upon his settee. "If I didn't know that you were talking for effect," he said, "I should take you by the scruff of your neck and the seat of your breeches and hurl you down-stairs. I know you better than to believe that you are the cold-blooded brute that you make yourself out to be. Anyhow, we'll not discuss the matter. The one useful thing you have said — and on which I shall try to act — is that Graham and

I must try to be more human with the Governor. He deserves it. What's the program?"

"For me," said Kenyon, "dinner with Lascelles and bridge to the early hours. With good cards and a fairly good partner I shall hope to make a bit. What are you going to do?"

"I shall dine in Hall," said Peter, "and then go out for a walk."

"I see." Kenyon got up, filled his cigarette case from Peter's box and stood with his back to the mantel-piece. "You proposed to Betty to-day, didn't you?"

"How the deuce did you know that?"

Kenyon laughed. "My dear fellow," he said, "everybody knows that. You exuded romance when you arrived late at the Inn. The very waiter guessed it, and was so stirred, being Swiss, that he very nearly poured the soup down your mother's neck. And when your mother looked at you I saw something come into her eyes which showed me that she knew she had lost you. I wouldn't be a mother if you paid me!" And then he held out his hand with that charm of which he was past-master. "'Friend that sticketh closer than a brother,' three years; dashed bit of a slip of a girl, one week,—and where's your friend? Well, good luck, Peter! She's a nice little thing. Dream your dreams, old boy, but don't altogether forget the man who's been through Oxford with you."

Peter grasped the hand warmly. "Don't be an ass!" he said. "Go and brush your back hair. It's all sticking up."

And when he was alone, except for a golden patch of evening sun which had found its way through his window and had spilt itself on his carpet, Peter pulled out a little white glove from his pocket and kissed it.

"O God!" he said. "Help me to become a man."

XII

No one knew, because no one was told, of the many hours of grief which little Mrs. Guthrie endured after she left Oxford. There were two reasons for this grief. One, the inevitable realization that the time had come for some other woman to take her place with her son. She remained his mother, but she was no longer first. The other, that Peter had not told her about Betty at once and had left it for her to find out, as the others did. And this hurt badly. He had always been in the habit of telling her everything,—first at her knee, then as he stood on a level with her, and finally when he looked down upon her from his great height. Every one of his numerous letters written while he was so far away from home contained the outpourings of his soul — his troubles, difficulties, triumphs, wonderings and short incoherent cries for help. As Kenyon said, she had only to look at him once when he marched into the Old Inn at Woodstock with Betty to know that she had lost him. She waited for him that afternoon to tell her,— but he never spoke. Even as he put her into the train she hoped that he would remember, but he didn't. That wasn't

like her Peter, she told herself again and again. What was she to think but that it only needed one short week and a very pretty face to make him forget all the long years of her love and tenderness. It was very, very hard.

It is true that for the remainder of their holiday, during which, with her husband, Graham, Belle, and Betty, Mrs. Guthrie went from one charming place to another, seeing shrines and looking down from famous heights on garden-like valleys of English country, Peter's letters came as regularly as usual. They were no shorter and no less intimate: and in the first one that she received, the day after leaving Oxford, he told her his great news,— but he hadn't spoken of it — he hadn't come to her at once, and she felt with a great shock of pain that she was deposed. Also she was well aware of the fact that the same posts which brought her letters brought letters to Betty — and she was jealous.

Uttering no word of complaint, even to the Doctor, little Mrs. Guthrie nursed her sorrow and went out of her way to be very nice to Betty. Her mother-instinct told her that she must win this girl; otherwise there was a chance that she might in the future see very little of Peter. In all this she had one small triumph, of which she made the most. Her letters from Peter contained more news than those written to Betty, and thus she was able to score a little over the girl. With an air of great superiority, very natural under the circumstances, she told Betty and the others the manner in which Peter had gone down from Oxford; of the

dinner that was given to him by the American Club,— a great evening, during which he was presented with a silver cigarette box covered with signatures,— of the farewell luncheon with his professors and the delightful things that they said to him there; of his strenuous doings at Henley, the stern training, the race itself in which his boat was beaten; of the wild night on the Vanderbilt barge; of the few cheery days spent in London with a bunch of the Rhodesmen; and finally his preparations for his visit to Thrapstone-Wynyates, in Shropshire, the famous old Tudor House of Kenyon's father.

Three times during these pleasant weeks Peter ran down to see,— not her, but Betty, and went out with her with his face alight and then hurried back to his engagements, having given her, his mother, who loved him so, several hugs and a few incoherent words. It was the way of life, youth to youth, but it was very hard.

On the afternoon of the fifth of August, when the party crossed the gangplank at Southampton to go aboard the *Olympic,* little Mrs. Guthrie told herself that in a few minutes she would see Peter's great form elbowing through the crowd, although he had not said that he would be there to say good-bye. She almost hoped that something might prevent him from being in time, because she knew that he would not come solely to hold her in his arms, but for another reason. Nothing, however, did prevent him. He followed them almost instantly on board; and although he never left her side, he surreptitiously held Betty's hand all the time.

A smile of unusual bitterness crept all about the little woman's heart. It was very hard. He was her boy — her son — her first-born and the apple of her eye. She had come up for the first time to one of the rudest awakenings that a mother can ever know. And presently when the cry, "All ashore that's going ashore!" went up and Peter put both his big arms about her and said, "Good-bye, mummie, darling, I shall come home soon," she broke into such a fit of weeping and kissed him with a passion so great that the boy was startled and a little frightened. There was no time to think or ask questions. There was his father's hand to shake, and Graham's, and Belle to kiss. There was also Betty, and she was suddenly hugged before them all.

As the big liner sent out its raucous note of departure and moved away from the dock the little mother was unable to see the bare head of her boy above the heads of the great crowd. Her eyes were blinded. "He doesn't understand," she said to herself. "He doesn't understand."

Poor little mother! It was very hard.

XIII

The cottage on the borders of Lord Shropshire's park was just as pretty and just as small as the little lady who lived there. It was appropriately called "The Nest," although there was no male bird in it and it was devoid of young ones; but Mrs. Randolph

Lennox was so like a bird, with her trilly soprano voice, her quick dartings here and there and the peculiar way she had of getting all a-flutter when people called, that the name of her charming little place — first given by Kenyon — stuck, and was generally used.

It was perched up on high ground overlooking the gardens of the old Tudor House,— those wonderful Italian gardens in which Charles II had dallied with his mistresses on his return from his long, heart-breaking and hungry exile. It was tree-surrounded and creepers grew up its old walls to its thickly thatched roof. For many years it had been occupied by the agent of the estate, until — so it was said — it was won by Mrs. Lennox from the present Lord Shropshire as the result of a bet.

No one had ever seen Randolph Lennox and many people didn't believe that he was anything more than a myth; but the little woman gave herself out as the widow of this man and was accepted as such. Her income was small, but not so small as to preclude her from playing bridge for fairly large stakes, dressing exquisitely, riding to the hounds and keeping an extremely efficient ménage, consisting of two maid servants and an elderly gardener. It enabled her also to spend May and June in London yearly at a little hotel in Half Moon Street, Piccadilly, from which utterly correct little house she was taken nightly to dinner and to the theatre by one or other of the numerous young men who formed her entourage. Never taken actually into the heart of London society, she managed with quiet skill to attach herself to its rather

long limbs, and her name was frequently to be found in the columns of society papers as having been seen in a creation by Paquin or Macinka at Ranalagh or Hurlingham, the opera, or lunching at the Ritz.

At one time the tongue of rumor had been very busy about Mrs. Randolph Lennox,—"Baby" Lennox as she was commonly called. It was said that she had been lifted out of the chorus of the Gaiety at the age of nineteen by His Serene Highness, the Prince of Booch-Kehah; that she had passed under the control of Captain Harry Waterloo, and eventually, before disappearing for a time, figured in the Divorce Court as a corespondent. The tongue of rumor is, however, in the mouth of Ananias, and as Baby Lennox never spoke of herself except, a little sadly, as a woman whose brief married life was an unfortunate memory, her past remained a mystery and people were obliged to accept her for her present and her future. She was so small — so golden-haired — so large eyed — so fresh and young and dainty — so consistently charming and birdlike — that she was the Mecca of very young men. With the beautiful trustfulness of the male young they believed in her, and over and over again she could have changed her name to others which were equally euphonious and which, unlike her own, could be discovered in the Red Book. But as there was no money attached to them she continued to remain a young and interesting widow and to live in the little cottage on the hill and to pop in and out of the Shropshire house as the most popular member of its kaleidoscopic parties.

Whether there was any truth in the story that the present Lord Shropshire was related to her in a fatherly way no one will ever know, except perhaps Nicholas Kenyon, who in his treatment of her was uncharacteristically brotherly. These two, at any rate, had no secrets from each other and both regarded life from the same peculiar angle. As parasites they had everything in common and they assisted each other and played into each other's hands with a loyalty that was praiseworthy even under these circumstances.

Nicholas Kenyon's mother — a very large, handsome woman with brilliant teeth and amazing good-nature, who, even when in the best of health, never finished dressing till four o'clock in the afternoon and then never put much on — was undergoing a rest-cure in the west wing of Thrapstone-Wynyates when the boys arrived for the shooting. For nearly a year she had been playing auction every night until the very small hours and had, while in a nervous condition, stumbled across an emotional pamphlet written by a Welsh revivalist, which sent her straight to bed. She was really greatly shaken by it and perhaps a little bit frightened. It did not mince words about the future of women of her type, and she was shocked. Heaven seemed to her to be a place into which she had the same inherited right to walk as the Royal Enclosure at Ascot; but this vehement little book put a widely different point of view before her. Therefore it happened that the first woman to whom Peter was introduced was the little widow, "Baby" Lennox, who was acting as hostess.

Two evenings before she met Peter she had received a letter from Kenyon, which ran as follows:

"Carlton Hotel,

"Dear Old Girl:

"I shall turn up at home on Thursday in time for tea. I hear that mother is enjoying herself in the throes of some very pleasant imaginary complaint of sorts and has retired to the solitude of the west wing. After a busy season she no doubt wishes to read Wells' new novel of socialism and seduction and the latest Masefield poems, which always remind me of the ramblings of rum-soaked sailors in a Portsmouth pub. I, for one, shall miss her florid and inaccurate presence and the deliciously flagrant way in which she cheats at Bridge; but if father has gathered round him an August house-party on his usual lines, I look forward to a cheery time,— dog eating dog, if I may put it like that. I am bringing with me the man with whom I have shared rooms at Oxford,— Peter Guthrie. He's the American of whom I have spoken to you before. I am especially anxious for him to meet you, because, while under the hypnotic influence of Oxford in all the beauty of late spring, he has been fool enough to get himself engaged. Now, not only is Guthrie very useful to me, having a wealthy father and being himself a generous soul, but I am going to New York with him in October to see if that city can be made to render up some of its unlimited dollars, and I don't want him to be hanging, booby-eyed, at the heels of a girl until such time as I have found my feet. You have a wonderful way with the very young and unsophisticated and I shall really be enormously obliged if you will work your never-failing wiles on my most useful friend and draw his at present infatuated mind away from the nice, harmless

little girl who has just sailed. Fasten on him, my dear, and make him attach himself to you for the remainder of our holiday. Go as far as you dare or care,— the farther the better for my sake and eventually for his own. He is one of those admirable, simple, big, virgin men to whom women are a wonderful mystery. At present he has refused even to look through a glass, darkly, at that pleasant and compensating side of life, and he needs to be brought down from his self-made pedestal. It will do him good and me a service. Honestly, I find it more than a little trying to be in such close association with an Archangel. Turn your innocent blue eyes on him, Baby dear, and teach him things and, above all, get him out of this silly, sentimental tangle of his. Incidentally, he has money and can procure more and I feel sure that you will not find him a waste of your good efforts. He is a splendid specimen of what my particular Don was wont to call 'young manhood,' and when he plays ragtime he puts the Savoy, or, for the matter of that, any other English orchestra into a little round hole.

"Yours ever,

"N. K."

Quite unconscious of this scheme, Peter fell into the light-heartedness of this beautiful old house with his usual gusto. To his unsuspicious eyes Baby Lennox was quite the most charming woman he had ever met.

He was delighted, a little surprised and even a little jealous at the relations which existed between Kenyon and his father. He was quick to notice that they treated each other more like pals or brothers, than father and son, were entirely open and frank with each other, walked about arm in arm, played tennis

and billiards together and often spent hours in each other's society, laughing and talking. He noticed, too, that Kenyon always called his father "Tops," a name which had grown into daily use from the time when, as a tiny lad just able to talk, the things that most caught his fancy were Lord Shropshire's riding-boots, in which he seemed to live, being mostly on horseback. "Nicko" was what his father called Kenyon,— that and old man or old boy. He wished most deeply that he and his own father were on such good terms.

If Peter had heard the sort of things these two talked about and confided to each other, his surprise would have elaborated into amazement. The elder man took infinite pleasure in telling the one who was so complete a chip off the same block the most minute details of his love affairs during the time that he was at Sandhurst for his army training, while he was in a crack Cavalry regiment and while he knocked about London and Paris and Vienna before and after his marriage. Also he revelled in relating his racing and gambling experiences, describing the more shady episodes with witty phrases and a touch of satire that was highly entertaining to the younger man. They both agreed, with a paradoxical sort of honesty, deliberately and inherently, that they were not straight and accepted each other as such, and the father used frequently to speculate from which of his dull, responsible and worthy ancestors he acquired the tendency. It was certainly not from the late Lord Shropshire, whose brilliant work as a Cabinet Minister in several Governments and as one of the most valued advisers

of Queen Victoria had placed his name permanently in the annals of his country. "We get it from one of the women of the family, I suspect, Nicko," he had a way of saying, after a more than usually excellent dinner. "A dear, pretty creature who lived a double life with delightful finesse — the great lady and the human woman by turns. What d'you think, old boy? At any rate, you and I make no pretences and, 'pon my soul! I don't know which of us is the better exponent in the delicate and difficult art of sleight of hand. I wish I were going to America with you. I fancy that we should make in double harness enough to enable us to retire from the game and live like little gentlemen. As it is, you'll do very well, I've no doubt. From what I hear, the country reeks with wealthy young men waiting to be touched by an expert such as you are. Do some good work, old fellow, and when you come back you shall lend me a portion of your earnings, eh?"

They were a strange couple, these two, capable, outwardly charming and cut out for a very different way of life but for the regrettable possession of a kink which caused them to become harpies and turn the weaknesses of unsuspicion of human nature to their own advantage. Some psychologists might have gone out of their way to find excuses for these men and endeavor to prove that they would both have run straight but for the fact that they were always pushed for money. They would, however, have been wrong. Just as some men are born orators, some with mechanical and creative genius and some with the gift of

leadership, these two men were born crooked, and under no conditions, even the most favorable, could they have played any game according to the rules.

The men of the party were all excellent sportsmen and good fellows, and the women more than usually delightful representatives of English society. As a matter of fact, the men were all,— like Kenyon's father,— living on their wits and just avoiding criminal prosecution by the eighth of an inch. They called themselves racing men, which, translated into cold English, means that they were people of no ostensible means of livelihood, who attended every race meeting and backed horses on credit, taking their winnings and owing their losses until chased by crook solicitors. They all bore names well known in English history. They had all passed through the best schools and either Oxford, Cambridge or Sandhurst. One or two of them were still in the army. One had been requested to resign from the navy, the King having no further use for his services, and one was a Member of Parliament, having previously been hammered in the other house,— that is to say the Stock Exchange. The women of the party were either wives of these men or not, as the case may be. At any rate they were good to look at, amusing to talk to, and apparently without a care in the world. And if Lord Shropshire, in welcoming Peter to his famous house, had said, like the spider to the fly, "Come into my parlor so that whatever you have about you may be sucked dry by us," he would have been strictly truthful. Several other such men as Peter had gone into that web

sound and whole, but they had come out again with many things to regret and forget.

Who could say whether Peter would escape?

XIV

Peter had, as he duly reported to his mother and to Betty, a corking time at Thrapstone-Wynyates.

Although an open-air man, an athlete, whose reading had always been confined to those books only that were necessary to his work,— dry law books for the most part,— Peter was far from being insensible to the mellow beauty of the house, and his imagination, uncultivated so far as any training in art or architecture went, was subconsciously stirred by the knowledge that its floors and stone walks and galleries were worn by the feet of a long line of men and women whose loves and passions and hatreds had been worked out there and whose ghostly forms in all the picturesque trappings of several centuries haunted its echoing Hall and looked down from its walls, from their places in gold frames, upon its present occupants.

The atmosphere of Oxford, and especially of his own college, had often spun his thoughts from rowing and other strenuous, splendid, vital things, to the great silent army of dead men whose shouts had rung through the quad and whose rushing feet had gone under the old gate. But this house, standing bravely and with an indescribable sense of responsibility as one of the few rear-guards of those great days of

chivalry and gallant fighting for heroic causes, moved him differently. Here women had been and their perfume seemed to hang to the tapestries, and the influence of their hands that could no longer touch was everywhere apparent. Often Peter drew up short, on his way up the wide staircase, to listen for the click of high heels, the tinkle of a spinet and the rattle of dice. Everywhere he went he had a queer but not unpleasant sense of never being alone, just as most men have who walk along the cloisters of a cathedral whose vast array of empty prie-dieus have felt the knees of many generations and in whose lofty roof there is collected the voices of an unnumberable choir.

Up early enough to find the dew still wet on flowers and turf he enjoyed a swim every morning in the Italian bathing pool beneath the Cedar trees with Baby Lennox. Then he either went for a gallop, before breakfast, on one of Lord Shropshire's ponies — again with Baby Lennox — or had a round of golf with her on the workmanlike nine-hole course which had been laid out in the park. She played a neat game, driving straight, approaching deftly and putting like a book,— frequently beating him.

The picture of this very pretty little person as she stood on the edge of the bathing pool that first morning was, as she intended it to be, indescribably attractive. She came from her room in a white kimono worked with the beautiful designs which only the Chinese can achieve. Her golden hair was closely covered by a tight-fitting bathing cap of geranium red, most becoming to her white skin. "Mr. Peter!" she

called out. "I can't swim a bit, so you must look after me like — like a brother." And then, as though to show how silly that word was, she flung off the wrap and stood, all slim and sweet, in blue silk tights cut low at the neck and high above her little round white knees. Peter thought, with a kind of boyish gasp, that she looked like a most alluring drawing on the cover of a magazine. With an irresistible simplicity and utter lack of self-consciousness she stood, balanced on the edge of the pool, with the sun embracing her, in a diving attitude, in no hurry to take her dip. And when Peter, suddenly seized with the notion that he might be looking at her too intently, dived in, she gave a little cry of joy and dismay and jumped in after him. "You must hold me, you must hold me, or I shall go under!" she cried, and he swam with her to the steps. In reality she swam like a frog, but her beautiful assumption of inability and her pluck in jumping into deep water again and again to be taken possession of by him, filled him with admiration at her courage. With her tights wet and clinging and the water glistening on her white flesh she assured herself that she deserved admiration, having carefully calculated her effect. Practice makes perfect, and the very young are always alike.

The first morning on which she appeared in riding kit she again made a charming picture. She always rode astride, but few women would have ventured to wear such thin and such close-fitting white breeches. Her coat, cut like a man's, was of white drill. Her stock was white and her hat, with a wide flat brim was

of white straw, but her boots were as black and shiny as the back of a crow. "Your hand, Mr. Peter," she said, raising her little foot for the spring,— it was "Mr. Peter" still,—"what a gorgeous morning for a gallop." And for a moment she leaned warmly against his shoulder. Yes, she was quite pleased with the effect. Peter's face was flushed as they started off together.

When they golfed she had a delightful way of making her conversation from green to green into a sort of serial. With her head hatless, her short Irish homespun skirt displaying much blue stocking which exactly matched her silk sweater and her large befringed eyes, she made a fascinating opponent and companion. "No wonder you loved Oxford and all that it gave you. Quite a little tee, please. Thanks. To a man with any imagination —" A settle, a swing, a nice straight ball and silence while Peter beat his ball pressing for all he was worth; the picking up of the two bags and on side by side. "A man with any imagination must feel the beauty and underlying meaning of that inspiring atmosphere,— as of course you did. You, I can see, are highly susceptible to everything that is beautiful. You, I think, of all men, you who have managed to remain,— I'm sure I don't know how! — so unspoiled, will always remember and feel the influence of your college. A cleek, I think, don't you? No? A brassie? Just as you say." And so she would continue chatting merrily away all round, but always keen on her game and doing her best to do it credit, letting out nice little bits of flattery with so

naïve an air and with such frankly appreciative glances, that poor old Peter's vanity, hitherto absolutely dormant, began to bud, like new leaves in April.

It must be remembered that Peter was a rowing man. Always, except when out with the guns, he was with Baby Lennox. They were inseparable from the first day of his visit. Even in the evening they hunted in couples, because she was sick of Bridge, she said, and he gave out that he knew nothing at all about any card games and had no desire to learn. After being frequently pressed to cut in by Courthope, Pulsford, Fountain and the other men who could not bear to see him with an unscathed cheque-book, and tempted again and again by their well-groomed and delightfully friendly wives to try a hand, Peter was left alone. They were annoyed and irritated but they found that when Peter said "No" he didn't mean "Yes," like so many of the other young men whose weakness formed the greater part of these people's income; and so they very quickly gave him up to Baby Lennox, were obliged to be satisfied with his jovial piano-playing and make up for lost time with the inevitable members of the *nouveau riches* who lived near by and were only too glad to pay for the privilege of dining at Thrapstone-Wynyates in the odour of titles.

The nights being warm and windless, Peter sat out on the moon-bathed terrace with Baby Lennox listening to her girlish prattle and thinking how particularly charming she looked with the soft light on her golden hair and white arms and dainty foot. Sometimes, suddenly, her merry words would give place to sad

ones, and Peter's simple, honest heart would be touched by her artistic and mythical glimpses of the unhappy side of her life.

"Oh, Peter, Peter!" she said one night, unconsciously showing almost a yard of leg in a black lace stocking patterned with butterflies. "I wish, oh, how I wish that I'd been born like you, under a lucky star! I've always been in a smart and rather careless set and I've never really had time to see visions and walk in the garden of my soul." She spoke in capital letters. "If I'd met you when I was a little young thing you might have become my gardener to pluck the weeds out of my paths, and train the flowers of my mind. You might have planted seeds so sweet that in my best and most devout hours their blooms would have filled my thoughts with scent. Oh dear me, the might have beens,— how sad they are! But, in one thing at least I can take joy,— I'm all the better for knowing you, dear big Peter."

But these graver interludes never lasted long. Mrs. Lennox was far too clever for that. She would break the monotony of conversation by walking with her little hand on the boy's strong arm, or by dancing with him to the music of a gramophone placed in the open window of the morning room. How close she clung to him then and how sweet she was to hold!

And then, she would say, with a wonderful throb in her voice. "Oh, Peter, Peter! Isn't life wonderful — isn't it just the most wonderful and thrilling thing that is given to us? Listen to the stars — there's love in their song! Listen to the nightingale — love,

all love! Listen to the whisper of the breeze! Can't you hear it tell us to love and touch and taste all the sweets that are given us to enjoy? Oh, Peter, Peter! Listen, listen,— and live!"

In her picturesque and slangy way she announced to Kenyon, as soon as three days after the commencement of the house-party, that she "had got Peter well hooked." It was not, however, an accurate statement. It is true that Peter's vanity had been appealed to. Whose wouldn't have been? This attractive young thing was hostess. She was far and away prettier, younger, more alluring and more complex than any other woman in the party. And yet she had made a favorite of Peter at once and showed a frank pleasure in being with him at all possible times. He had hardly spoken for longer than an hour with her before she had said, in the middle of his description of the Henley week, "I *must* call you Mr. Peter, I *must*. May I?" She sent him little notes, too, charming, spontaneous little notes, to say "Good-night," and how greatly she had enjoyed the evening, or the swim, or the round of golf, beginning "Dear Big Man" and ending,— at first without a signature, and eventually with "Baby." At the beginning they were brought in by the man, or placed on the dressing-table against a bowl of flowers. Then they were thrust under his door by her after he had gone up to his room, or thrown through his open window from the narrow balcony that ran round the house. Her room was next to his. She had seen to that. In a hundred unexpected and appealing ways she had set out to prove to him that they were indeed,

as she had said they were, "very, very close friends."

Now, Peter had never been a woman's man. To him women and their ways were new and wonderful. He suspected nothing. Why should he? He accepted Mrs. Randolph Lennox on her face value, which was priceless, as so many other excellent and unsophisticated young men had done. He believed in her and her stories and was very sorry that she had been unhappy. He believed that she was sincere and good and clean and that she liked him and was his friend.

Kenyon, who watched all this, called Peter an easy mark. He was. What else could he be in the expert and cunning hands of such a woman?

As for Mrs. Lennox, her performance,— it was rather in the nature of a performance,— was all the more brilliant and effective because Peter appealed to her more than any man she had ever met. His height and strength and squareness, his fearless honesty, his unself-conscious pride and boyish love of life,— she liked them all. She liked his clean-cut healthy face and thick hair and amazing laugh. But, above everything, she liked him for being untilled soil, virgin earth. It was this that piqued her seriously and set alight in her a desire which grew and grew, to test her charms upon him, to taste him, to stir him into a first great passion. And this was the real reason that she gave him so much of her time and company. The gratification of this desire was the thing for which she was working, upon which she had set her mind. Hers was not a record of failures. Peter stood a very poor chance of getting out whole.

XV

Nicholas Kenyon has promised himself that, one of these days, when abject poverty forces him to work, he will write a whole book about Peter and Baby Lennox, and call it "Another Temptation of St. Anthony."

Not only did Kenyon watch this, to him, rather extraordinary incident, with keen interest, but so also did the members of his father's house-party, who came to regard Peter as a kind of freak. They all knew,— because they were all psychologists,— that Mrs. Lennox was badly smitten, as they put it, on this young American. They all knew,— because one of the women made it her business to spy,— that their temporary hostess was going through all the tricks of her trade to seduce this unconscious boy.

The incident provided Lord Shropshire and his friends with endless amusement, and bets were made as to how long Peter would hold out. Every morning something new was reported to them by the lady who had appointed herself to watch. One day it was that Baby had taken Peter to see her cottage after dinner and had had a little fainting fit in her bedroom while showing him the view from the window. Another that she had twisted her ankle on the eighth hole and had been obliged to ask to be carried back to the house. There was, however, no evidence, not even of a circumstantial nature, to prove that Baby had succeeded. It was presently agreed that either Peter was a fool or an angel.

There was one incident, however, which escaped unnoticed,— one of which even Kenyon knew nothing. It took place three nights before the party broke up.

After a gorgeous day of hard exercise and splendid fresh air, an hour at the piano after dinner and his usual talk to Baby under the moon, Peter went up to bed at eleven o'clock. He was very sleepy and meant to be up earlier than ever in the morning. He didn't say good-night to Kenyon or his satirical father. They were, like the others, very seriously at work making what money they could. There had been a fairly large dinner-party drawn from the surrounding houses, and there were eight bridge tables occupied in the large drawing-room. He left Mrs. Lennox in the hall looking more delicious than ever and went up to his room to smoke a final pipe and look over an illustrated paper before turning in.

His room was large and square and wainscotted, with dull grilled ceiling, and an oak floor so old that here and there it slanted badly. His bed was a four-poster, deeply carved at the back with the Kenyon arms, the motto underneath rather sarcastically being "For God and Honour." In front of the fireplace, with its sprawling iron dogs and oak setting, there was a long, narrow sofa filled with cushions, and at its side a small writing-table on which stood two tall silver candlesticks. These gave the room its only light and added to the Rembrandtesque atmosphere of it. It was a room which reeked with history and episodes of historical romance, love and sudden death. The windows which led to the balcony were open and the warm

air of a wonderful night puffed in, causing the candle flames to move with a gentle rhythmic dignity to and fro.

Peter read and smoked for half an hour in his dressing-gown, while Quixotic moths flung themselves passionately into the candle-light one after another to die for some unexplainable ideal. From the drawing-room below a woman's throbbing voice drifted up, singing an Indian love song, and when it ceased the whole night was set a quiver by a nightingale's outburst of appeal. These things, and the silver wonder of the moon and stars, the touch of Mrs. Lennox's soft hand on his lips and the feeling and almost psychic undercurrent of strange emotion in that room in which so much had taken place, all stirred and thrilled the boy and sent his blood racing in his veins.

He stayed up longer than he intended, listening and wondering and wishing, for the first time in his life, that he had read poetry, so that he could fit some immortal lines to his mood and his surroundings. It was this, to him, curious thought which set him laughing and broke some of the spell. "Gee!" he said to himself, "can you *see* me spouting Shakespeare or mouthing Byron?" He shied his dressing-gown into the sofa, put both flames out with one huge blow and leaped into bed.

Almost instantly he heard his name urgently called. He sat up. Was he dreaming? Who should call at that time of night? Could it be Baby? He heard the call again. It was nearer. A little shadow fell suddenly upon the floor of his room. And then, in the

window, with the shaft of moonlight all about her, stood Mrs. Lennox.

Peter caught his breath and clambered out of his bed. "What is it?" he asked. "What's the matter?"

The woman ran in with a glad cry. "Oh, Peter! I thought you had gone out of your room," she whispered, "and I didn't know what to do. I saw a hideous figure walk through my wall just after I had put out my light, and when it came towards me with long, bony fingers, I rushed out and came to you. Oh, hold me, Peter, hold me! I'm terrified and as cold as a frog!"

She slipped into his arms, all young and sweet and incoherent, trembling like a little bird in a thunderstorm. It was a most calculated piece of perfect acting.

Peter's heart seemed to jump into his mouth. The flowing hair of the little head that lay on his chest was full of the most intoxicating scent.

"I'll — I'll go and see what it is," he said abruptly.

"No, no! Don't go. I can't let you go, Peter. Stay with me!"

"But, if there's a man in your room ——"

"It wasn't a man. It was the ghost that belongs to the family. It always comes before some dreadful accident. Oh, darling, stay with me! Take care of me! I'm terrified!"

She clung to him in a very ecstasy of fright and the closeness and warmth of her body sent Peter's brain whirling. He tried to speak, to think of some-

thing to say, but all his thoughts were in the swirl of a mill-stream, and he held her tighter and put his face against her hair, while his heart pumped and every preconceived idea, every hard-fought-for ideal went crash.

"I love you. I love you, Peter. My Peter!" she whispered. "Who but you should shelter me and hold me and keep me in your arms! Keep me with you always, night and day. Look into my eyes and see how much you mean to me, my man."

She raised her head and stood on tiptoe. The jealous moon had laid its light upon her face and her eyes were shining and her lips were parted, and the slight silk covering had fallen from her shoulder. The whiteness of it dazzled.

"Oh, my God!" said Peter, but as he bent to kiss her mouth, momentarily drunk with the touch and scent of her, someone shouted his name and thumped on his door, and Mrs. Lennox tore herself away and ran through the window like a moon-woman.

The door was flung open. Fountain came in, his voice a little thick. "I say, Guthrie, are you getting up early in the morning? 'Cause, if so, I'll take you on for nine holes before breakfast. What d'yer say? Goin' to get healthy, d'yer see? What?"

Peter found his voice. "All right!" he said.

"Will you? Good man. Give me a call at six, will you? We'll bathe in the pool before coming in. So long then." And out he went again, lurching a little and banging the door behind him.

For several queer minutes Peter stood swaying, with

his breath nearly gone as though he had been rowing, and one big hand on his throbbing head. And as he stood there the posts of the bed seemed to turn into trees and its cover into soft grass all alive with the yellow heads of "bread and cheese," and among them sat Betty, with her eyes full of love, confidence and implicit faith,— Betty, for whom he had saved himself.

And then he started walking about the room. Up and down he went — up and down — cursing himself and his weakness which had nearly smashed his dream and put his loyalty into the dust.

And when,— she also had cursed,— Mrs. Lennox stole back, as sweet and alluring as ever, and even more determined, she found that Peter had re-lit his candles, got into his dressing-gown again and was sitting at the table writing.

"Peter! Peter!" she called.

But he didn't hear.

"Peter!" she whispered, and went nearer and nearer until her body rested against his shoulder.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he said, rising. "Is it all right now? That's fine. It's just a touch cold. Don't you think you'd better be in bed?"

Baby Lennox had seen the beginning of the letter, "My own Betty." She nodded, drew back her upper lip in a queer smile and turned and went. She was clever enough to know that she had lost.

And then Peter bent again over his letter, and in writing to the little girl whom he adored with all his heart, he was safe.

PART TWO

THE CITY

I

"MOTHER took the car to Lord & Taylor's," said Belle, looking herself over in the long glass with a scrutiny that was eventually entirely favorable. "I guess it'll do us good to walk."

"I'd simply love to," said Betty. "But I must just run in and tell father I'm going to have dinner with you. I won't be a minute."

"All right, my dear. Time's cheap. Don't hurry on my account."

Belle went over to the dressing-table. She had only recently powdered her nose from the elaborate apparatus from which she rarely permitted herself to be separated, but a little more would do no harm. She burst into involuntary song as she performed a trick which she might so well have afforded to leave to those ladies of doubtful summers to whose Anno Domini complexions the thick disguise of powder may perhaps be useful. Tucked into her blouse there was a letter from Kenyon which had come a week ago. It was only a matter of days before she was to see him again.

And Betty ran out of her bedroom and along a passage which led to the studio. A stretch of cloudless sky could be seen through a recess window, and the far-below flat roofs of the old buildings on the corner of Gramercy Park. She knocked and waited. There was a grunt, and she went in.

Into the large lofty room — a cross between a barn and an attic — a hard north light was falling with cruel accuracy. It showed up stacks of unframed canvasses with their faces turned to the dark wall and the imperfections of several massive pieces of oak, the worn appearance of the stained floor, the age of the Persian rugs and of a florid woman who sat with studied grace and an anxious expression of pleasant thought on the dais, with one indecently beringed hand resting with strained nonchalance on the arm of her chair and the other about an ineffably bored Pekingese.

Ranken Townsend, the successful portrait painter, had backed away from his almost life-size canvas, and with his fine untidy head on one side and irritation in his red-grey beard was glaring at it with savage antagonism.

The lady on the dais had crow's-feet round her made-up eyes, and a chin that could not be made anything but double however high she held it. Also — as the north light seemed to take a hideous delight in proving — her figure was irreclaimably dumpy and plump. The lady on the canvas, however,— such is Art that runs an expensive studio, good wines and well-preserved Coronas,— was slight and lovely and patrician, and should she stand up, at least six feet tall. No wonder Townsend grunted and glared at the commercial fraud in front of him, at which, in his good, idealistic, hungry Paris days he would have slung wet brushes and the honest curses of the Place Pigalle. He was selling his gift once more for five thousand dollars. His wife dressed at Bendels.

Anger and irritation went out of the painter's eyes when he saw the sweet face that peeked in. "Hello, sweetheart!" he sang out. "Come in and bring a touch of sun. Mrs. Vandervelde, I'd like you to meet my little girl."

Without turning her head or breaking a pose that she considered to have become, after many serious attempts, extremely effective, the much-paragraphed lady, whose lizard-covered mansion in Fifth Avenue was always one of the objects touched upon by the megaphone men in rubber-neck wagons, murmured a few words. "How d'you do, child? How well you look."

Betty smothered a laugh. Mrs. Vandervelde had acquired the habit of looking through her ears. "I'm going home with Belle, father, and I shall stay to dinner. But I'll be back before ten."

"Will you? All right." He tilted up her face and kissed it. "I'm dining at the National Arts Club tonight, and I guess I shall be late." He pointed his brush at the canvas and made the grimace of a man who's obliged to swallow a big dose of evil-smelling physic. So Betty, who understood and was sorry, put his hand to her lips, bowed to the indifferent lady and slipped away. The room was perceptibly colder when she left. The picture was already four thousand two hundred dollars toward completion, and Betty was just as much relieved as her father, who returned angrily to work to paint in the diamonds. He was sick of that smile.

While waiting for the elevator, Belle gave a rather

self-conscious laugh and lifted her tight skirt quickly. "Seen the latest, Betty?" She showed a tiny square watch edged with diamonds worn as a garter. "Cunning, isn't it?"

"Why, I should just think it was! Where did you buy it?"

"Buy it? My dear, can you see me paying three hundred dollars for something that doesn't show? Harry Spearman gave it to me last night, and put it on in his car on the way to the Pierrot Club."

"Put it on?"

Belle threw back her beautiful head and burst out laughing. "You said that just like the Quaker girl in the play at the Hudson. Why shouldn't he put it on? It amused him and didn't hurt me. He's a sculptor, and like the bus-conductor, 'legs is no treat to him,' anyway."

They entered the elevator, dropped nine floors to the wide foyer of the palatial apartment house, and went out into the street. It was a typical New York October afternoon — the sky blue and clear, the sun warm and the air alive with that pinch of ozone of which no other city in the world can boast. The girls instinctively made their way towards Fifth Avenue, warily dodging the amazing traffic, the struggling wagons and plunging horses going in and out of buildings in course of ear-splitting construction, and coal-chutes, in the middle of the sidewalks.

"But you were not at the opening of the Pierrot Club last night," said Betty. "I heard you tell Mrs.

Guthrie that you were dining with the Delanos and going to their theatre party."

"I know. But Harry Spearman sent round a note in the afternoon asking me to have dinner with him at Delmonico's and go on to the Club to dance. I had such a severe headache that I rang up Mrs. Delano and reluctantly begged to be excused. To quote Nicholas, theatre parties with elderly people bore me stiff. As it was, I had a perfectly corking time till one o'clock and danced every dance."

"Did you tell Mrs. Guthrie?"

"For Heaven's sake, Betty, what *do* you take me for? Mother isn't my school-teacher and I don't have to ask her for permission to live. I have my latch-key and dear little mother is perfectly happy. As she never knows what I do she never has to worry about me; and, as she always says, I can only be young once." A curious little smile played round her very red lips. "It's true that Harry Spearman is rather unmanageable when he gets one alone in a car after several hours of champagne and ragtime, but — oh, well, I guess I can take care of myself. Do you know, I don't think the Pierrot Club's going to be as good this winter. It's a year old, you see. Everybody's going to the new room at the Plaza — that is, everybody back from the country. It's rather a pity, I think. I like the Club, but the motto of New York is 'Follow the Crowd,' and so the Plaza's for me."

Betty's admiration for her school-fellow and closest friend was invincible and her loyalty very true. It made her therefore a little uneasy to notice about her

a growing artificiality which was neither attractive nor characteristic. She knew better than anyone that Belle was a remarkable girl. She had a kind heart. She possessed that rarest of gifts, a sense of gratitude, and if her talent for writing had been properly developed she might eventually have made her mark. She had a quick perception — sympathy and imagination not often found in so young a girl — an uncanny ear for the right word — and if she chose to exercise it, quite an unusual power of concentration. It seemed to Betty to be such a pity that, just at the moment when Belle left school with her mind filled with ideals and the ambition to make something of herself and do things, the Doctor found himself a rich man. The incentive to work which the constant need for economy had awakened in her went out like a snuffed candle. From having before been in the habit of saying, with eager enthusiasm, "I'm *going* to do such and such a thing, whatever the odds," she immediately began to say: "Oh, my dear, what's the use?" Everything for which she had intended to work became now hers for the asking. Her father gave her a free hand in the matter of entertaining her young friends. She could order what books she wished to read from Brentano's, and she had a generous allowance on which to dress. Like a chameleon she quickly changed the rather dull colors of her former surroundings for those bright ones which the sudden accession to wealth made it easy to acquire. Her outlook was no longer that of the daughter of an overworked general practitioner whose income had to be carefully managed in

order to live not too far up-town and educate a family of four, but of a débutante whose parents entertained distinguished men and women in a fashionable street and whose friends were equally well off. Her inherited and cultivated energy was, of course, obliged to find vent in some direction, since it was not employed in the development of her talent; and it was now burnt up in a restless search of enjoyment, a constant series of engagements to lunch and dine, and do the theatre and dance,— especially dance. The ordinary healthy, high-spirited young man, who had not much to say for himself, quickly bored her. Her wits required to be kept sharp, her latent intelligence needed something on which to feed. It was therefore natural that she should throw her smiles at men much older and far more experienced than herself and who, from the fact that they did not intend to give anything for nothing, exercised her ingenuity and native wit to keep them in order. In a word, she found that playing with fire and avoiding being burned kept that side of her in good condition which, in her old circumstances, would have been devoted to work. And so with a sort of conscious superficiality she had allowed herself to flit from one unmeaning incident to another and entered into a series of artificial flirtations with men who had no scruples and one passion simply in order to kill time. Her carelessness led her into episodes, the merest hint of which would have thrown dear little Mrs. Guthrie into a panic, and her coolness permitted her to escape from them with perhaps more ingenuity than dignity. Even upon her return from

England with her heart full of Nicholas Kenyon, and with a desire to see him again that kept her awake at night, she frittered away her superfluous energy with this Harry Spearman, whom no woman with any respect for her daughter would willingly allow within a mile of her, even if properly chaperoned.

Betty, being one of those girls who had never been suspected of any talent, but who nevertheless had it in her to perform a far more womanly and beautiful thing than to write books or plays — to be in fact a good wife to the man she loved and a good mother to his children — looked at Belle's way of living with growing anxiety. She was not a prude or a prig. She had not been allowed out in the world with eyes all curious to see the truth of things through a veil of false modesty. Her father, a wise and humane man, had seen to that. She delighted in enjoyment, went to the theatre whenever she had the opportunity and danced herself out of shoes. But, not being ambitious to shine, she was content to apply her energy to the ordinary work that came to her to do,— the practical, everyday, undramatic, domestic things that cropped up hourly in the strange house where the father was an artist and the mother suffered from individualism and was a leader of new movements. Leaving school to find a home in a constant state of chaos, her father rarely out of his studio, her mother always in the throes of committee meetings and speech-making,— she knuckled down to set it in order, to clear out an extravagant cook with an appetite for hysterics, and a sloppy Irish waitress whose hairpins fell every-

where and whose loose hand dropped things of value almost before it touched them. This done she found others and appointed herself housekeeper, and the duties of this position kept her both busy and happy,—the one being hyphenated to the other. But even if her father had been, like Dr. Guthrie, a rich man instead of one who lived up to every penny that he earned and generally several thousand dollars beyond, she had nothing in her character that, however little she was occupied, would have allowed her to look at life from the modern standpoint of Belle and her other friends. She was — and rejoiced in the fact — old-fashioned. Most of her ideas were what is now scoffingly called "early Victorian," because they were not loose and careless, and the many things that Belle and others found "fearfully amusing" were, to her, impossible. She didn't, for instance, leave her petticoat in the cloak-room when she went to dances, so that her partners might find her better fun. She didn't go to tea alone with mere acquaintances in bachelor apartments, or for taxi rides with her partner between dances. She never made herself cheap, and went out of her way to avoid men whose eyes ran calculatingly over her figure. These things and many others merely appealed to her as the perquisite of those girls who did not place a very high value upon self-respect.

The Guthries lived at 55 East Fifty-second Street. It was the house which the man whom Dr. Guthrie called his benefactor had built for himself and left to the doctor whom he was proud to endow. The architect who had been employed had been given a

free hand. He had not been required to mix his styles or perform extraordinary architectural gymnastics of any kind. The result of his efforts was good. It was a house such as one sees in one of the numerous old London squares within sound of the mellow clock of St. James's Palace. Addison might have lived in it, or Walpole or Pepys. Its face was scrupulously plain and its doorway was modelled on those of the Adams period. Standing between two very florid examples of modern architecture it made one think of the portrait of a charming early Victorian gentlewoman between the photographs of two present-day chorus ladies in hoopskirts and a cloud of chiffon. The rooms were large and lofty and were all furnished with great simplicity and taste. There was nothing in them except old furniture which had been collected in England by its late owner, piece by piece, and its oak chests, armoires and secretaries, china closets, corner pieces and Chippendale chairs were very good to look at and live with. So also were the pictures, — Cattermoles, Bartalozzi engravings, colored prints and a half-dozen priceless oil paintings by old masters, — which made the small, cunning, unscrupulous, eager mouths of the numerous art collectors of New York water with desire. The library, too, out of which led the Doctor's laboratory, was almost unique, and contained first editions and specimens of rare and beautiful book-binding which filled the Doctor's heart with constant pleasure and delight. It was nearly a year before the man who had struggled so hard to lift himself out of his father's small farm could believe

that he wasn't walking in his sleep when he passed through these beautiful rooms, and often he was obliged to pinch himself to make sure that he was not dreaming.

There was however one room in this house which would have given its late owner many shudders to enter. This was the little mother's own particular room, the windows of which looked out upon that row of small, red, bandbox-like houses opposite which had managed to remain standing in spite of the rapacious hands of reconstruction companies which are never so happy as when destroying old landmarks and tearing down old buildings. Into this room Mrs. Guthrie had placed all the furniture of her first sitting-room,— cheap, late Victorian stuff of which she had been so inordinately and properly proud when she started housekeeping with the young doctor. From these things Mrs. Guthrie could not be parted. They were all redolent with good and tender memories and were to her mind far more valuable and more beautiful than all the priceless old oak pieces put together.

Curiously enough — or perhaps not curiously at all — this was Peter's favorite room, too, and he never entered it without renewing his vows to climb to the top of his own tree, as his father had done. Belle, Graham and Ethel all laughed at the little mother for clinging to this "rubbish," as they called it, which was so out of keeping with the rest of the house. But Peter sympathized with her and never failed while sitting there in the evening, in close and intimate con-

versation with the dear little woman who meant so much to him, to get from it a new desire to emulate his father and make his own way in the same brave spirit.

When Belle and Betty arrived at East Fifty-second Street — a little tired after their walk — they found Graham in the hall. "Oh, hello!" said he. "Been shopping?"

"No," answered Belle, "nothing tempted us. We've walked all the way home from Gramercy Park, — some walk! Everything I've got on is sticking to me. Aren't you home early, Graham?"

Graham nodded. "Nothing doing," he said. "Besides, I'm dining early." He turned to Belle with a rather curious smile. "I thought you were to be with the Delanos last night."

Belle tilted her chin. "I was. I dined there, went to the Winter Garden and then danced at Bustanoby's."

"I caught sight of you in Spearman's car somewhere about one o'clock in the morning. Did he drive you home?"

"I guess he did, dear boy," said Belle, blandly, "and by the way, we saw you, going in to supper somewhere with a girl with a Vogue face and an open-air back!"

Graham laughed. "That's different," he said. "Spearman isn't the sort of man I care to see my sister going about with alone. I advise you to be a little more fastidious."

"Thank you, Graham darling," said Belle, quite unmoved, "but I'm old enough to choose my own friends

without your butting in. Just for fun, would you tell me what *you* know about the word fastidious?"

"That's different," said Graham again. And he went up-stairs to his own room with rather heavy feet.

Belle looked at Betty and a little smile curled up the corners of her beautiful red mouth. "I don't see anything wrong with Harry Spearman, and he's an old friend of the Delanos. My word, but isn't Graham a good sport?"

Presently when they went into the drawing-room they found little Mrs. Guthrie sitting in front of the table with a more than usually happy smile, and Ethel lying on the sofa looking the very epitome of an interesting invalid. With a slightly critical frown on her pretty face she was reading Wells's latest novel,— a full-blooded effort well calculated to improve the condition of a girl of fifteen who had not gone back to school on account of anæmia.

With quick intuition, and one glance at her mother's face, Belle knew she had heard from Peter. "Any news?" she asked eagerly.

"Yes, darling,— the very best of news. A Marconi from my boy," said Mrs. Guthrie.

"What does he say?"

"Oh, what does he say?" asked Betty. But the question was asked mentally, because little Mrs. Guthrie was happy and must not be made jealous.

Putting on her glasses with great deliberation, Mrs. Guthrie picked up a book, and with a smile of pride and excitement hunted through its pages and even-

tually produced the cable form, which she had used as a marker.

"*Do* hurry, mother, *dear!*" cried Belle. News from Peter meant news from Nicholas.

"Now please don't fluster me, Belle. Of course I would unfold it the wrong side up, wouldn't I? Well, this is what he says: 'Expect to dock day after to-morrow, dearest Mum. All my love.'"

"Is that all he says? Is there nothing about his — his friend?"

Ethel gave a quiet chuckle, of which Belle coldly took no notice.

"There are a few more words," replied Mrs. Guthrie, "and I expect they were very expensive."

"Oh, mother, darling; *do* go on!"

"Let me see, now. Oh, yes. 'And to Betty.'"

"Oh, thank you," said Betty. "Oh, Peter, my Peter!" she cried in her heart.

This time Ethel laughed. But no one noticed it. It was rather disappointing.

"At last I shall see Nicholas again," thought Belle, —"at last!"

And the little mother folded up the cable very carefully and slipped it back into the book. Peter had sent it to her,— to her.

And then Belle turned her attention to her little sister, who not only looked most interesting, but knew that she did. "I think you condescended to be amused, Grandmamma," she said, in the most good-natured spirit of chaff. Like everybody else in the

family she was really rather proud of this very finished production of an ultra-modern and fashionable school.

"I seem to have missed a lot of fun by not going to Europe," replied Ethel. "It would have been very entertaining to watch you and Betty fall in love."

"I guess so," said Belle. "The only thing is that you would have been very much odd man out. They draw the line at little school-girls at Oxford."

"Now don't begin to quarrel, girls," said Mrs. Guthrie. "I'm very sorry Ethel wasn't with us. The trip would have widened her view and given her much to think about. But never mind. She shall go with us next time."

Ethel stifled a yawn. "Thank you, mamma, dear. But when I go to England I may elect to stay there. I think it's very probable that I shall marry an Englishman and settle down to country life, doing London in the season."

Belle's laugh rang out. "That's the sort of thing we have to put up with, Betty," she said. "You're going to marry a Duke, aren't you, Baby, and be a Lady in Waiting at Court, with a full-page photograph every week in the *Tatler?* When Peter comes home he'll find you a constant source of joy. My descriptions of the way in which you've come on while he's been away always made him laugh."

Ethel rose languidly from the sofa, at the side of which a little nourishment had been served. Mrs. Guthrie, who had been busily at work knitting a scarf

for Graham — a thing that he would certainly never wear — went quickly to give her a hand. "Are you going to your room now, darling?" she asked.

Ethel caught Belle's rather sceptical eye and, with exquisite coolness, entirely ignored its suggestion that she was shamming. "Yes, mamma, dear. I shall go to bed almost at once. There's nothing like sleep for anæmia. Of course I shall have to read for a little while, because insomnia goes with my complaint, but I shall fall off as soon as I can. Please don't come in to-night, in case you disturb me. I'll tell Ellen to put my hot milk in a thermos."

Belle burst into another laugh. "You beat the band," she said. "Any one would think that your school was for the daughters of royalty. I know exactly what Nicholas Kenyon will call you."

Ethel turned towards her sister with raised eyebrows. With her rather retroussé nose, fine, wide-apart eyes and soft round chin she looked very pretty and amazingly self-composed. Her poise was that of a woman who had been a leader of society for years. "Yes? And what will that be?"

"The queen of the Flappers," said Belle.

Ethel picked up her book, carefully placing the marker. "Oxford slang leaves me cold," she said, loftily.

"I certainly hope that he'll call her nothing of the sort," said Mrs. Guthrie. "'Flapper.' What a terrible word! What does it mean?"

"It means girls under seventeen who have discovered all the secrets of life, the value of a pair of pretty

ankles and exactly how to get everybody else to do things for them. It's the best word I heard in England."

"Nicholas Kenyon sounds to me rather a precocious boy," said Ethel.

"Boy! Nicholas Kenyon a boy—! Well!" Belle acknowledged herself beaten. She could find no other words.

The little mother put her arm, with great affection, around the shoulders of her youngest child, of whom she was extremely proud and a little frightened. "Never mind, darling," she said. "Belle doesn't mean anything. It's only her fun."

"Oh, that's all right, mamma. I make full allowance for Belle. She's a little crude yet, but she'll improve in time."

Belle gave a scream of joy. Her sense of the ridiculous, always extremely keen, made her delight in her little sister and the perfectly placid way in which she sailed through existence with the lofty superiority of her type—a type that is the peculiar result of supercivilization and the deferential treatment of fashionable schoolmistresses who bow to wealth as before a god.

"Run in and say good-night to father. He won't mind being disturbed for a moment by you."

"I don't think I will," said Ethel. "The sight of his laboratory may give me a nightmare. I really must be careful about myself just now. Good night, mamma dear. Don't sit up too late. Good night, Belle. I should advise you to go to bed at once.

Your complexion is beginning to show the effects of late hours already."

"Oh, you funny little thing," said Belle. "You give me a pain. Trot off to bed; and instead of reading Wells, Ibsen and George Bernard Shaw, try a course of Louisa Alcott and a dose of Swiss Family Robinson. That'll do you much more good and make you a little more human."

But even this plain sisterly speaking had no apparent effect. Ethel gave Betty, who had been watching and listening to the little bout with the surprise of an only child, a small peck on the cheek. "Good night, dear Betty," she said. "I'm glad that you're going to be my sister-in-law. Unless Peter has changed very much since he's been away he'll make a good husband."

And then, with quiet grace, she left the room. No one, not even Belle, whose high spirits and love of life had led her into many perfectly harmless adventures when she was the same age, suspected that Ethel was up to anything. They were wrong. The self-constituted invalid had invented anæmia for two very good reasons. First, because she was not going to be deprived of welcoming her big brother when he returned home for good, school or no school, and second because she had struck up a surreptitious acquaintance with the good-looking boy next door. At present it had gone no further than the daily exchange of letters and telephone calls. The adventure was in the course, however, of speedy development. The boy was going to pay her a visit that evening, by way

of the roof. No wonder Ethel didn't want to be disturbed.

With an unwonted burst of extravagance Betty took a taxi home as soon after dinner as she could get away. "Is there a letter for me? Is there a letter for me?" she asked the moon and all the stars in the clear sky as her rackety cab bowled swiftly downtown.

She let herself in and the first thing that caught her eyes was the welcome sight of a thick envelope addressed in Peter's big round, honest, unaffected hand.

"Peter, oh, my Peter!" she whispered, pressing the letter to her lips.

Within five minutes she was sitting on her bed, in the seclusion of her own room, and what Peter had to say for himself was this:

"Carlton Hotel, London,
"September 28, 1913.

"My dearest Betty:

"Gee! but I was mighty glad to find a letter from you this afternoon when I got in, so glad that I dashed out of this Hotel, went across the street to the White Star offices and asked them to exchange my bookings to a boat sailing a week earlier, because I just can't stand being away from you any longer. I don't know what Nick will say, and don't much care. He's at Newmarket staying with a man who trains horses. I've just sent him a telegram to say what I've done, and as he's very keen to see New York and is only killing time, I don't think he'll kick up a row. I would have sailed on the *Olympic*, which left the day after I said good-bye to Thrapstone-Wynyates, if I hadn't promised father to go up to Scotland and see the place where his ancestors lived. I couldn't back out of that,

especially as goodness only knows when I shall come to Europe again,— perhaps not until I bring you over on a honeymoon, my baby, and we go back to Oxford together to see how the fairy ring is getting on. We must do that some day. You don't know how I love that little open space where the trees haven't grown so that the moon may spill itself in a big patch for all our friends to dance in on fine nights. I've read your letter a dozen times and know it by heart, like all the others you've written to me. You write the most wonderful letters, darling. I wish I knew how to send you something worth reading, though I'm quite sure you don't mind my clumsy way of putting things down, because you know how much I love you and because everything I say comes straight out of my heart.

"My last letter was written in Scotland, Cupar Fife. I shall always remember that quiet little place where the red-headed Guthries,— they must have been red-headed from eating so much porridge,— tilled the earth and brought up sheep in the way they should go. The village seems as much cut off from the rest of the world as though it were surrounded by sea, and every small thing that happens excites it. The man who kept the Inn that I stayed in (feeling frightfully lonely, though really very much interested) had words with his good woman one night and the rights and wrongs of the perfectly private matter have since divided all the inhabitants. Best friends don't speak and the minister is going to preach about the affair next Sunday. I saw the house the old Guthries lived in and was taken all over it by a kind old soul to whom father gave more money than she thought existed when he was there. Gee! but my great-grandfather must have had precious little ambition to live his whole life in a little hole like that. In most of the

rooms the beds were in small alcoves and needed climbing up to like bunks. Mrs. McAlister, who lives there now with her married daughter and her seven children, sleeps in one of these fug-holes in the kitchen. Think of it! And she said that the floor swarms with beetles — she can hear them crackling about in the night. All the same, by Jove! this primitive living makes men. I can see from whom father got his grit and determination.

"I was glad to find myself in London. I've only been here for a night or two at various times and it's a wilderness to me. I lose myself every time I go out and have to ask Bobbies how to get back. Topping chaps, these Bobbies. They mostly look like gentlemen and are awfully glad to get a laugh. To hear them talk about the 'Aymarket, Piccadilly Surcuss, Wart'loo Plaice and Westminister Habbey first of all puzzles one and then fills one with joy. As to the Abbey,— oh, Gee! but isn't it away beyond words! I spent a whole day wandering about among the graves of its mighty dead, and finally when I got to the end of the cloister and came upon that small, square, open space where the grass grows so green and sparrows play about, I was glad there was nobody to see me except the maid-servant of one of the minor Canons who was taking in the milk for afternoon tea. There are one or two vacant niches among the shrines of men who have done things and moved things on, in which I should like to stand (not looking a bit like myself in stone) when I have done my job, and if I were an Englishman I should work for it. As it is, I shall work for you and all you mean to me, my baby, and that's even a higher privilege.

"I went to a theatre last night,— Wyndham's. I thought the play was corking, but the leading actor — an ugly good-looking fellow — wasn't trying a yard, and let

it away down every time he was on. Also he spent his time making jokes under his breath to the other people to dry them up. No wonder the theatres are in a bad way in London. There's no snap and ginger about the shows except the ones of the variety theatres, where they really do take off their coats for business. It's fine to hear ragtimes at these places, although they're as stale on our side as if they had been played away back before the great wind. By the way, I'm a bit anxious about Graham. His letters have a queer undercurrent in them.

"I'm going to the National Gallery, the British Museum and South Kensington to-morrow, and in the evening I'm dining at the Trocadero with eight men who were up at St. John's with me. They're all working in London and hate it, after Oxford. It seems odd to me not to be there myself and I miss it mighty badly sometimes. All the same it's great to feel that one's a man at last, with real work to do and that apartment waiting for us to win. This is the last mail that I can catch before sailing and so I just have to tell you once again, in case you forget it, that I adore you and that if I don't see you on the landing in little old New York among the crowd I shall sink away like an India-rubber balloon with a pin in it. So long, my dearest girl. All, all my love, now and forever. "PETER."

"P. S. Do you think your father can be brought to like me somehow or other?

"Kiss this exact spot."

II

A GOOD sport! Oh, yes, Graham answered admirably to that description,— according to its present-day

use. Graham, like Belle, was suffering from the fact that everything was too easy. His father's so-called benefactor had taken all the sting of life for that boy. Fundamentally he had inherited a considerable amount of his father's grit. He needed the impetus of struggle to use up that sense of adventure which was deep-rooted in his nature. He was a throw-back. He had all the stuff in him that was in his ancestors,— those early pioneers who were momentarily up against the grim facts of life. He was not cut out for civilization. He needed action, the physical strain and stress of hunting for his food among primeval surroundings and the constant exercise of his strength in dangerous positions. He would have made a fine sailor, a reckless soldier or an excellent flying man. He was as much out of his element in Wall Street as a sporting dog which is doomed to pass away its life sitting beside a chauffeur in an elaborate motor-car. The daring recklessness which would have been an asset to him as a hunter of big game or a man who attached himself to dangerous expeditions, found vent, in the heart of civilization, in gambling and running wild. It was a pity to see such a lad so utterly misplaced and going to the devil with an alacrity that alarmed even some of his very loose friends. If his father had continued to be a hard-working doctor whose income was barely large enough to cover his yearly expenses, Graham could have used up his superabundant energies in climbing, rung by rung, any ladder at the bottom of which he had been placed. As it was, he found himself through his father's sudden accession

to wealth, beginning where most men leave off, with nothing to fight for — nothing to put his teeth into — nothing for which to take off his coat. It was all wrong. He made money and lost it with equal ease — although he lost more than he won. He was surrounded with luxuries when he should have been faced daily with the splendid difficulties which go to form character and mental strength. Somehow or other his innate desire for adventure had to be used up. With no one to exercise any discipline over him, with no steady hand to guide him and control, he flung himself headlong into the vortex of the night life of the great city and was an easy prey for its rastaquores. At the age of twenty-four he already knew what it was to be haunted by money-lenders. Already he was up to the innumerable dodges of the men who borrow from Peter to pay Paul. He was a well-known figure in gambling clubs and the houses in the red-light district, and he numbered among his friends men and women who made a specialty of dealing with boys of his type and who laid their nets with consummate knowledge of humanity and with the most dastardly callousness. He was indeed, in the usual inaccurate conception of the word, a good "sport," and stood every chance of paying for the privilege with his health, his self-respect and the whole of his future life.

To have seen the nervous way in which he dressed for dinner the next evening, throwing tie after tie away with irritable cursing, would have convinced the most casual observer of the fact that he stood in need

of a strong hand. His very appearance,— the dark lines round his eyes, the unsteadiness of his hand,— denoted plainly enough the sort of life that he was leading, but the short-sighted eyes of the Doctor in whose house he lived missed all this, and there was no one except the little mother to cry "halt" to this poor lad and, in her experience, of what avail was she?

He drove — after having dined with three other Wall Street men at Sherry's — to an apartment house on West Fortieth Street, little imagining that fate had determined to put him to the test. Kenyon had recommended him to try it. He had heard of it from Captain Fountain's brother, who had called it "very hot stuff" in one of his letters,— the headquarters of a so-called "Bohemian" set in which Art and gambling were combined. It was run by a woman whose name was Russian, whose instincts were cosmopolitan, and who had been shifted out of most of the great European cities by the police. "The Papowsky," as she was called, spoke several languages equally fluently. She was something of a judge of art. She had an uncanny way of being able to predict success or failure to new plays. She knew musicians when she saw them and only had to smell a book to know whether it had excellence or not. Her short, thin body and yellow skin, her black hair cut in a fringe over her eyes and short all round like that of a Shakesperian page, her long, dark, Oriental eyes and her long artistic hands were in themselves far from attractive. It was her wit and sarcasm how-

ever and the brilliant way in which she summed up people and things which made her the leader of those odd people — to be found in every great city — who delight in being unconventional and find excitement in a game of chance.

The apartment in which she held her "receptions" and entertainments was unique. The principal room was a large and lofty studio, arranged like a grotto with rocks and curious lights and secluded places where there were divans. Here there was a dais, at the back of which there was an organ, and a grand piano stood upon it in a French frame all over cupids, and it was here that the most extraordinary exhibitions of dancing were given by the Papowsky hand-maidens and others.

The other people who lived in this apartment house had already begun to talk about it in whispers, and its reputation had gone out into the city. One or two feeble complaints had been made to the police, but without any avail. At the moment when Graham had first entered it, it was in its second year and was flourishing like the proverbial Bay Tree. The magnets which drew him to this house of Arabian Nights were the roulette table in a secluded room at the end of the passage, and one of the hand-maidens of the Papowsky, whose large, gazelle-like eyes and soft caressing hands drew him from other haunts, and followed him into his dreams.

III

GRAHAM'S hat and coat were taken by a Japanese servant, whose little eyes twinkled a welcome.

The long, brilliantly lighted passage which led to the studio was hung with nudes, some of them painted in oils with a sure touch, some highly finished in black-and-white, and the rest dashed off in chalks,— rough impressionist things which might have been drawn by art students under the influence of drink. Between them in narrow black frames there was a collection of diabolically clever caricatures of well-known singers, actors, authors, painters and politicians, each one bringing out the weaknesses of the victims with peculiar impishness and insight. The floor of the passage was covered with a thick black pile carpet, which smothered all noise.

As Graham entered the studio several strange minor chords were struck on the piano and a woman's deep contralto voice filled the large studio like winter wind moaning through an old chimney.

The Papowsky, who was giving an evening for young artists, and was half-covered in a more than usually grotesque garment, slid out of the shadow and gave Graham her left hand, murmuring a welcome. Exuding a curious pungent aroma, she placed a long finger on her red, thin lips and slipped away again. For some minutes Graham remained where she left him, trying to accustom his eyes to the dim — though far from religious — light. He made out men in

dress clothes sitting here and there and the glint of nymph-like forms passing from place to place, springily. The scent of cigarette smoke mixed with that of some queer intoxicating perfume. The sound of water plashing from a fountain came to his ears.

On his way to find a seat, Graham's arm was suddenly seized, he was pulled into a corner and found himself, gladly enough, alone with the girl who called herself Ita Strabosck. There was one blue light in this alcove and by it he could see that the girl was dressed like an Apache in black suit with trousers which belled out over her little ankles and fitted her tightly everywhere else. She retained her close grip and began to whisper eagerly to him. Her foreign accent was more marked than usual, owing to the emotion under which she obviously labored. Her heart hammered against his arm.

"You have come to zee me?"

Graham whispered back. "Don't I always come to see you?"

"You like me?"

Graham bent forward and kissed her mouth.

"You love me?"

The boy laughed.

"S-s-s-h! Eef you love me, eef you really and truly love me, I vill to-night ask you to prove eet."

"I've been waiting," said Graham, with a sudden touch of passion.

"Zen take me avay from this 'ell. I 'ave a soul. Eet ees killing me. I 'ave a longing for God's air.

Take me back to eet. The Papowsky ees a vile woman. She lure me 'ere and I am a prisoner. You do not know the 'orrors of zis place. I am young. I am almost a child. I was good and I can be good again. At once, when you come 'ere, I saw in you one who might rescue me from zis. I love you. You say you love me. I beseech you to take me away."

Graham was stirred by this emotional appeal whispered in his ear, by the young arms that were flung round his neck, and by the little body that was all soft against him. His sense of chivalry and his innate desire for adventure were instantly set ablaze. At the same time, what could he do with this strange little girl? Where could he put her?

He began to whisper back something of his inability to help, but a hand was quickly placed over his mouth.

"Eef you believe in God, take me away. I do not care what you do with me. I do not care eef you make me work for my bread. You are not like ze rest. You too are young and you are a man, and I love you. I will be your servant — your slave. I will kiss your feet. I will give you myself. I will wait on you 'and and foot. Give me a little room near ze sky and see me once a day, but take me out of this evil place — I am being poisoned. Vill you do zis? Vill you?" She slipped down on her knees and clasped her hands together.

In the faint blue light Graham could see the large eyes of the girl looking up at him through tears, as though to a saviour. Her whole attitude was one of

great appeal. Her young, slim body trembled and the throbbing of her voice with its curious foreign accent moved him to an overwhelming pity. Here then was something that he could do — was a way in which he could exercise his bottled up sense of adventure which had hitherto only been kept in some sort of control by gambling and running risks.

"Do you mean that you're forced to remain here, — that you can't get out if you want to?"

"Yes, yes, yes! I tell you I was caught like a wild bird and zis ees my cage. Ze door ees guarded."

A great excitement seized the boy. He lifted Ita up and put his mouth to her ear. "You've come to the right man. I'll get you out of this. I always loathed to see you here,— but how's it to be done? She has eyes in the back of her head, and those damned Japanese servants are everywhere."

"Eeet ees for you to sink," said the girl. "You are a man."

"I see," said Graham. "Right. Leave it to me."

He liked being made responsible. He liked the utter trust which this girl placed in him. He liked the feeling of danger. The whole episode and its uncanny romance caught hold of him. It was not every day that in the middle of civilization the chance came to do something which smacked of mediævalism — which had in it something of the high adventure of Ivanhoe.

He said: "Get away quick and put your clothes on. Don't pack anything — just dress. There won't

be any one in the roulette room until after twelve. Go in there and hide behind the curtains and wait for me. Quick, now!"

Once more the girl flung her arms about him and put her lips to his mouth.

For several minutes Graham remained alone in the alcove, with his blood running swiftly through his veins — his brain hard at work. The woman on the dais was still singing. In the vague, uncertain light he could see the Papowsky curled up on a divan near by, smoking a cigarette. Other people had come in and made groups among the foolish rockery. Then he got up quietly, went out into the passage and looked about. He had never before explored the place, he only knew the studio and the roulette room. It dawned upon him that this apartment was just beneath the roof of the building. Somewhere or other there was likely to be an outlet to the fire-escape. That was the idea. He had it. The girl had said that it would be impossible to take her away by the main door. Those Japanese servants were evidently watch-dogs. Even as he stood there, wondering, he saw that he was eyed by a small, square-shouldered Japanese whose head seemed to be too large for his body and whose oily deferential grin was not to be trusted. He lit a cigarette, and putting on what he considered to be an air of extreme nonchalance, strolled along until he came to the roulette room. No one was there. The candelabra were only partially alight. He darted quickly to the window and flung it up. The iron steps of the fire-escape ran past it

to the roof. "Fine!" he said to himself. "Now I know what to do."

He shut the window quickly and turned round just as the man who had been watching him came in. "Say!" he said. "Just go and get me a high-ball. Bring it here." He followed the man to the door and into the passage and watched him waddle away. He had not been there more than a moment when the door opposite opened bit by bit, and the girl's face, with large frightened eyes, peeped round the corner. In a little black hat and a plain frock with a very tight skirt she looked younger and prettier and more in need of help than ever. Without a word, Graham caught hold of her hand, drew her into the passage, shut her door, ran her into the roulette room and placed her behind the curtains, making sure that her feet were hidden. Whistling softly to himself he sat down and waited. The man seemed to have been gone half an hour. It was really only a few minutes before he waddled back on his heels. Graham took the drink. "How soon do you think they'll begin to play to-night?" he asked, keeping his voice steady with a huge effort.

The Japanese shrugged his shoulders. "As usual, sir," he said, smiling from ear to ear and rubbing his hands together as though he were washing them. "Any time after twelve, sir — any time, sir."

"All right!" said Graham. "I shall wait here."

He kept up the air of boredom until he imagined that the small, black-haired, olive-tinted man had had time to get well away. Then he sprang to the door,

saw that the passage was empty, darted back into the room and over to the window.

"Come on!" he said. "Quick's the word!" and climbed out, giving the girl his hand. For a moment they stood together on the ledge of the fire-escape, the stairs of which seemed to run endlessly down. With a chuckle of triumph Graham shut the window, as the girl gave a little cry of dismay.

She had called that place hell, but from the height on which they stood it seemed as though they were climbing down from the sky.

IV

"UPTOWN," said Graham to the taxi driver. "I'll tell you where when I know myself."

A knowing and sympathetic grin covered the big Irish face and a raucous yell came from the hard-used engine, and the taxi went forward with a huge jerk.

The little girl turned her large eyes on Graham. "You do not know vhere you take me?" she asked.

"No, by thunder, I don't. I can't drive you like this to a hotel, you've got no baggage. Most of my friends live in bachelor apartments, and the women I know,— well, I would like to see their faces if I turned up with you — and *this* story."

The girl's foreign gesture was eloquent of despair. She heaved a deep sigh and drew into the corner of

the cab. The passing lights shone intermittently on her little white face. How small and pitiful and helpless she looked.

The sight of her set Graham's brain working again. In getting her out of the Papowsky's poisonous place and leading her step by step down the winding fire-escape and, when it ceased abruptly in mid-air, into the window of a restaurant, he had been brought to the end of one line of thought,— that of getting the girl safely out of her prison. He now started on another, while the cab rocked along the trolley lines beneath the elevated railway, sometimes swerving dangerously out and round the iron supports.

Suddenly Graham was seized with an idea. He put his head out of the cab window and shouted to the driver: "Fifty-five East Fifty-second Street."

The girl turned to him hopefully. "What ees zat?" she asked.

"My home."

"Your 'ome? You take me to your 'ome?"

"Why no, not exactly. I'm going in to get a bag for you. It won't have much in it except a brush and comb and a pair of my pajamas, but with them we can drive to any quiet hotel and I'll get a room for you. In the morning I'll find a little furnished apartment and you can go out and buy some clothes and the other things that you need. How's that?"

Ita caught up his hand and held it against her heart. "But you are not going to leave me?"

"Yes, I must," said Graham. "I shall have to register you as my sister. You've just come off the

train and I've met you at the station. Oh, don't cry! It's the best I can do. It's only just for one night. I'll fix things to-morrow and you'll be very happy in a little apartment of your own, won't you? I'll see you every day there."

With a sudden and almost painfully touching abandon of gratitude the girl flung herself on the floor of the cab and put her head on Graham's knees, calling on God to bless him. Something came into the boy's throat.

The taxi crossed Fifth Avenue behind a motor-car that was also going towards Madison Avenue. It looked very familiar to Graham. Supposing it was his father returning from one of his medical meetings! He put his head out again, sharply: "Stop at the first house on East Fifty-second Street!" he shouted. Almost before the cab had stopped he leaped out. "Wait for me here," he added.

"Sure an' I will." The driver threw a glance at his taxi-meter. Not for him to care how long he waited.

Graham darted along the street and up the steps of Number fifty-five, and just as he had the key in the door he heard his father's voice.

"No, no. Let my car take you home. Yes, a wonderful evening. Most inspiring. Good night! Let's meet again soon!"

Graham made up his mind what to do. He held the door open for the Doctor and stood waiting for him, with the bored look of one who has had a rather dull evening.

"Oh, thank you, Graham," said Dr. Guthrie. "Have you just got back?"

"Yes; I thought I'd get to bed early to-night."

"You look as though you needed sleep," said the Doctor. "But — but don't go up at once. Please come and have a cigarette in my room. I've — I've been speaking at the Academy of Medicine,— explaining a new discovery. A great triumph, Graham, a great triumph. I would like to tell one of my sons about it. Won't you come?"

There was an unwonted look of excitement on his father's thin face and a ring in his voice which made it almost youthful. It was the first time that Graham had ever received such an invitation. He was surprised, and if he had not been so desperately anxious to slip up-stairs, lay quick hands on the bag and get away again he would have accepted it gladly. For a reason that he could not explain he felt at that instant an almost unbearable desire to find his father, to get in touch with him, to give something and receive something that he seemed to yearn for and need more urgently than at any other moment in his life. As it was, he was obliged to back out. "I'm frightfully tired to-night," he said, yawning.

"Oh, are you? I'm sorry," said the Doctor apologetically. "Some other night perhaps — some other night."

The two men stood facing each other uncomfortably. Exhilaration had for a moment broken down the Doctor's shyness. It all came back to him when he found his son's eyes upon him like those of a

stranger. He took off his coat and hat, said "Good-night" nervously and went quickly across the hall and into his library.

He was deeply hurt. He stood among those priceless books with a curious pain running through his veins. "What's the matter with me?" he asked himself. "Why do I chill my children and make them draw back?"

Graham shut the door, and then as quickly as an eel ran up-stairs to his bedroom, turned on the light, opened the door of the closet and pulled out a large suit-case. Then he began to hunt among the drawers of his wardrobe for some pajamas. He threw these in. From his bathroom he caught up a brush and comb and some bedroom slippers. These followed the pajamas. Then he shut the case, picked it up, crept quietly down-stairs, across the hall and out into the street, shutting the door softly behind him. He gave the taxi-driver the name of a small hotel frequented by actors, and jumped into the cab.

Ita Strabosck welcomed him as though he had been gone a week. "'Ow good you are to me!" she cried. "Eef you never do anysing else een your life, zis that you 'ave done for me vill be written down by zee angels een your book."

Graham laughed. "The angels — I wonder."

All the same he was a little proud of himself. Not many men would have perfected the rescue of this little girl so neatly from a house in which her body and soul were in jeopardy. It had been an episode in his sophisticated life which was all to his credit.

He felt that,— with pleasure liked the idea of being responsible for this poor little soul, of having some one dependent entirely upon his generosity and who presently would wait for his step with a fluttering heart and run to meet him when he came in tired. He liked also the thought that this girl would be a little secret of his own,— some one personal to himself, to whom he could take his worries — and he had many — and get sympathy and even advice.

The cab drew up. Graham released himself from the girl's arms and led her into the small and rather fuggy foyer of the hotel, which was a stone's throw from Broadway. A colored porter pounced upon the bag and an alert clerk looked up from the mail that he was sorting.

"I want a room for my sister," said Graham, "with bath. Got one?"

"Fifth floor," said the clerk, after gazing fixedly for a moment at something at the back of the screen. He then pushed the book towards Graham.

Without a moment's hesitation, Graham wrote "Miss Nancy Robertson, Buffalo," and took the key that was extended to him. "Come on, Nancy," he said, and led the way to the elevator, in which was waiting a tall, florid woman carrying a small bulldog in her arms. She had obviously not taken very great pains to remove the make-up from her face which had been necessary to her small part. Graham recognized her as an actress whom he had seen some nights before in an English play at the Thirty-ninth Street Theatre, and he thought how queer life was and what

odd tricks it played. Not a foot away from each other stood two women, the one just back from a place in which she had been aping a human being in a piece utterly artificial and untrue, the other who had played a part in a tragedy of grim and horrible reality, out of which she had been carried before the inevitable climax.

The colored boy, with a hospitable grin on his face, led the way along a narrow, shabby passage whose wall-paper was much the worse for wear, and finally opened the door of a small bedroom, switching on the light.

"I'll undo the case," said Graham quickly.

The boy drew back. "Sure."

"And say! If you'll see that my sister gets what she rings for I'll give you five dollars."

"You bet your life, sah." There was a dazzling glint of white teeth.

"Thanks."

"You welcome."

The cry of joy and relief which made the whole room quiver, as soon as the porter had gone, went straight to Graham's heart. "I guess it's not much of a room," he said, a little huskily, "but we'll change all this to-morrow."

The girl ran her hand over the pillow and the bed-cover. "Oh, but eet ees zo sweet and clean," she said, between tears and laughter, "and no one can come. Eet ees mine. You are zo, *zo* good to me."

Graham undid the case and spilt the meagre contents on the bed. Then he put his hands on Ita's

shoulders and kissed her. "Good-night, you poor little thing," he said. "Sleep well, order anything that you want, and don't leave this room until I come and fetch you. Your troubles are over."

She clung to him. "But you vill stay a leetle — just a leetle?"

"No, I'm going now."

There was nowhere in Graham's mind the remotest desire to stay. A new and strange chivalry had taken the place of the passion that had swept over him earlier in the evening when the blue light had fallen on her slim body.

She looked into his face, nodded and put her lips to his cheek. "Good night, zen," she said. "You 'ave taken me out of hell. You are very good."

And as Graham walked home under the gleaming moon and the star-bespattered sky, there was a little queer song in his rather lonely heart.

Poor, simple, sophisticated lad! How easy it had been for that cunning little creature whose one ambition was to be the mistress of an apartment in business for herself, to take advantage of his unfed sense of adventure. She, and fate, had certainly played him a very impish trick.

V

The *Oceanic* had been timed to dock at four-thirty, but the thick mist at the mouth of the Hudson had caused some delay and her mail had been heavy. The consequence was that she was edged in to her dock

considerably more than an hour late, to be welcomed by an outburst of long-expectant handkerchiefs.

During the period of waiting — by no means unpleasant, because the sun fell warmly upon the wonderful river — several brief, emotional conversations took place between the people who had come to greet Peter. The Guthries were there in a body,— even Ethel had pulled herself together and had come to be among the first to greet her favorite brother. Graham wouldn't have missed the occasion for anything on earth. His love for Peter was deep and true. And it was good to see the excitement of them all and of the little mother, who was in a state of verging between tears and laughter all the time. Her big boy was coming home again and once more she would have the ineffable joy of tucking him up at night sometimes, and asking God to bless him before she drew the clothes about his ears as she had done so often. Even the Doctor found it necessary to take off his glasses several times and rub them clear of the moisture that prevented him from seeing the approaching vessel which seemed to have given herself up to the bullying of the small but energetic tugs whose blunt noses butted into her.

Betty brought her father; and these two, with a delicacy of feeling characteristic of them, placed themselves among the crowd away from the Guthrie family. Intuitively, Betty knew that much as Mrs. Guthrie liked her, she would rather resent her presence there at such a moment. Belle's quick eyes very soon discovered them, however, and presently they

permitted themselves to be drawn into the family group.

It was a curious moment for Ranken Townsend and his feelings were not unlike those of little Mrs. Guthrie. "My God!" he said to himself as he stood looking out at the wide river, its marvellous and strenuous life and the amazing sky-line of the buildings on the opposite bank; "has the time arrived already for me to lose my little girl? Am I so old that I have a young thing ripe enough for marriage and to bring into the world young things of her own?"

The artist had only met the elder Guthries once before, although Belle was a particular friend of his, having been frequently brought to his studio by Betty. He knew Peter only from having seen him in the treasured snapshots which his little daughter brought home with her from Oxford. He had to confess to himself — although his natural jealousy made him unwilling to do so — that Peter looked just the sort of man whom he would like his daughter to marry when her time came. And so he singled out Mrs. Guthrie almost at once and drew her aside. The breeze blew through his Viking beard, and a fellow-feeling brought into his eyes an expression of sympathy which immediately warmed Mrs. Guthrie's heart towards him. "I didn't want to come this afternoon, Mrs. Guthrie," he said. "Shall I explain why?"

"No," said the little mother. "I quite understand."

"Your boy and my girl are following the inevitable

laws of nature, and it's rather hard luck for us both, isn't it?"

Mrs. Guthrie put her handkerchief up to her mouth and nodded.

"Betty's a good girl and I've only to look at you to know that the man to whom she's given her heart is a fine fellow. Well, it brings us up to another milestone, doesn't it? — one that I wish was still some years ahead. However, let's face it with pluck and with unselfishness, and be friends. Shall we?"

"Please," said the little mother, giving him her hand.

Ranken Townsend bared his head.

And then Dr. Guthrie came up and peered at the man who was talking to his wife. He vaguely remembered the artist's picturesque appearance and fine open face, but he had forgotten his name.

Mrs. Guthrie hurried to the rescue. "You remember Mr. Townsend, of course, Hunter," she said. "Betty's father, you know."

"I beg your pardon," said the Doctor. "Of course I remember you, and I'm very delighted to see you again. You have friends coming on the *Oceanic* too, then?"

Townsend laughed. "No, I don't know anybody on her — not a soul. All the same I've come to meet your son."

"Indeed! It's very kind of you, I'm sure." And then the Doctor suddenly remembered that sooner or later he'd be obliged to share Peter with the man who stood before him, and just for a moment he — like

his wife and like the other father — felt the inevitable stab of jealousy. He covered it with a cordial smile. "What am I thinking about? Betty brought you, naturally. We must meet more often now, Mr. Townsend."

"I should like nothing better. I don't know your boy yet except through his photographs and my having met his mother, but I'm very proud to know that my little girl is to bear a name that will always be honoured in this country."

Dr. Guthrie blushed and bowed, and put his hand up to his tie nervously.

It was a curious little meeting, this. All three parents were self-conscious and uncomfortable. They would have been antagonistic but for the very true human note that each recognized. They were all reminded of the unpleasant fact that they were in sight of a new and wide cross-road in their lives, along which they were presently to see two of their young people walking away together hand in hand. Parenthood has in it everything that is beautiful, but much that is disappointing and inevitable — much that brings pain and a sudden sense of loneliness.

There was a very different ring in the conversation of Betty and Belle, who stood a few yards away surrounded by people of all the strange conglomerate nationalities which go to make up the population of the United States. Good-tempered, affectionate and excitable Hebrews were already shouting welcomes to their friends on the *Oceanic*, as the vessel drew slowly nearer. Temperamental Irish were alternately wav-

ing handkerchiefs and daubing their eyes with them, and others — of French, German, Dutch, Swedish, Norwegian, Russian and English extraction — were trying to discern the faces of those who were near and dear to them among the passengers who were leaning over the rails of the vessel. It was an animated and moving scene, very much more cheery than the ones which take place on the same spot when the great trans-Atlantic Liners slip out into the river.

"Look!" cried Belle. "There's Nicholas. Isn't he absolutely and wonderfully English?"

"And there's Peter!" said Betty, with a catch in her voice. "And isn't he splendidly American?"

"Oh, I'm so excited I can hardly stand still. I've dreamed of this every night ever since we came home."

"So have I. But this is better than dreams. Look! Peter has seen us. He's waving his hat. Even his hair seems to be sunburnt."

Belle laughed, though her eyes were full of tears. "I can almost smell the violet stuff that Nicholas puts on his."

Then there was the usual rush as the liner slid into her berth, and as Mrs. Guthrie was swept away with it, holding tight to Graham's arm, she said to herself: "He waved to Betty first. O God, make me brave!"

All the same, it was the little mother to whom Peter went first as he came ashore, and he held her very tight, so that she could hardly breathe, and said: "Darling mum! How good to see you!" and there was something in that.

The Doctor took his boy's big hand with less self-

consciousness than usual. He wished that he might have had the pluck to kiss him on both cheeks and thus follow the excellent example of a little fat Frenchman who had nearly thrown him off his balance in his eagerness to welcome a thin, dark boy.

"Hello, Belle! Hello, Graham! Hello, Ethel!" And then Peter stood in front of Betty, to whom he said nothing, but the kiss that he gave her meant more than the whole of a dictionary. "Oh, my Peter!" she whispered.

Nicholas Kenyon followed with his most winning smile, and was cordially welcomed. He had charming things to say to everyone, especially to Belle. After close scrutiny, Ethel's inward criticism of him was that he had "escaped being Oxford."

And then Ranken Townsend held out his hand. "But for me, Peter Guthrie," he said, "you wouldn't have had a sweetheart. Shake!"

A wave of color spread all over Peter's brown face. He grasped the outstretched hand. "I'm awfully glad to see you," he said.

"And I'm awfully glad to see you." The artist measured the boy up. Yes, he was well satisfied. Here stood a man in whose clean eyes he recognized the spirit of a boy. Betty had chosen well. "Do you smoke a pipe?"

"Well, rather."

"I thought so. Bring it along to my studio as soon as your mother can spare you and we'll talk about life and love and the great hereafter. Is that a bet?"

"That's a bet," said Peter. And he added, putting

his mouth close to Betty's ear: "Darling, he's a corker! He likes me. Gee, that's fine!" Then he turned to his mother, ran his arm round her shoulder, walked her over to the place in the great echoing, bustling shed over which a huge "G" hung, and sat down with her on somebody else's trunk which had just been flung there, to wait with unapproving patience for that blessed time when one of the officialdom's chewing gods, having forced a prying hand among his shirts and underclothing, should mark his baggage with a magic cross and so permit him to reconnect himself with life.

Nicholas Kenyon, as immaculate as though he had just emerged from a bandbox, slipped his hand surreptitiously into Belle's. "Are you glad to see me?" he asked, under his breath.

Belle said nothing in reply, but the look that she gave him instead set that expert's blood racing through his veins and gave him something to look forward to that alone made it worth crossing a waste of unnecessary water.

VI

"A VERY pleasant domestic evening," said Kenyon, standing with his back to the fireplace of the library. "The bosom of this family is certainly very warm. Peter, my dear old boy, I had no idea that you were going to bring me to a house in which a Prime Minister or the President of the Royal Academy might be very proud to dwell. Also, may I congratulate you

upon your little sister? She's a humorist. I found myself furbishing up all my epigrams when I spoke to her. By Jove, she's like a Baliol blood with his hair in a braid."

A quiet chuckle came from Graham, who was sitting on the arm of a big deep chair, looking up at Kenyon with the sort of admiration that is paid by a student to his master. "I don't know anything about Baliol bloods," he said, "but Ethel takes a lot of beating. When she quoted Bernard Shaw, at dinner, father nearly swallowed his fork."

Peter was sitting on the table, swinging his legs. "Oh, she'll be all right when she gets away from her school. She'll grow younger every day then. What awful places they are — these American girl schools. They seem to inject into their victims a sort of liquid artificiality. It takes a lot of living down. Upon my soul, I hardly knew the kid! Two years have made a most tremendous difference in her. I thought I should throw a fit when she looked at me just now in the drawing-room and said: 'The childish influence of Oxford has left you almost unspoiled, Peter, dear.'"

Kenyon laughed. "Excellent!" he said. "I know the English flapper pretty well. It'll give me extreme delight to play Columbus among the American variety of the species." He looked round the beautiful room with an approving eye. "That must have been a very civilized old gentleman who made this collection. I wonder if he bought some of the books from Thrapstone-Wynyates! My father was

forced to sell some of them shortly after he succeeded to the title. As the long arm of coincidence frequently stretches across the Atlantic, I should like to think that some of the first editions in which my grandfather took so high a pride have found their way into an atmosphere so entirely pleasant as this. One of these fine days, Peter, they may raise a little necessary bullion for you."

"I hope not," said Peter.

Graham got up. "It's only eleven o'clock. Suppose we get out and see something. Everybody's gone to bed, we shan't be missed."

"A very brainy notion," said Kenyon, "but what's there to do?"

"Oodles of things," said Graham.

"Well, lead the way. I'm with you. The dull monotony of life aboard a liner has given me a thirst for twinkling ankles, the clash of cymbals and the glare of the lime-light. You with us, Peter?"

"Yes, unless — one second." He went over to the telephone that stood on a small table in a far corner of the room, looked up a number in the book, asked for it and hung on.

Kenyon shot a wink at Graham. "Get your hat, old boy," he said. "Peter would a-wooing go. He's the most desperately thorough person." And he added inwardly: "Hang that girl."

"Can I speak to Mr. Townsend? Oh, is that you, Mr. Townsend? Peter Guthrie, yes. May I come round and have a jaw —? Thanks, awfully! I'll get a taxi right away." He turned back to the other

two men. "Great work," he said. "You two will have to go alone to-night. However, we've a thousand years in front of us. See you at breakfast. So long!"

"Wait a second," said Graham. "I'll ring up a taxi and we'll all ride down together."

"Right-o!" said Peter. "I'll rush up to my room and get a pipe."

When he came down again he found Kenyon and Graham waiting at the open door. A taxicab was chugging on the curbstone. Kenyon got in first, with his long cigarette holder between his teeth and a rakish-looking opera hat balanced over his left eye. He carried a thin black overcoat. All about him there was the very essence of Piccadilly. Peter sat beside him and Graham opposite. The cab turned round, crossed Madison into Fifth Avenue and went quickly downtown. The great wide street, as shiny as that of the Champs Élysée, was comparatively clear of traffic. Peter looked at the passing houses with the intense and affectionate interest of the man who comes home again. At the corner of West Forty-second Street Graham stopped the cab. "It's only a short walk to the best of the cabarets," he said; "we'll let Peter go straight on. Come on, Nicholas, bundle out."

"Where are we going?" asked Kenyon, making a graceful exit.

"Louis Martin's, old boy," said Graham.

"Pretty hot stuff, I hope. Au revoir, Peter. Do your best to make the bearded paint merchant like you.

You'll have some difficulty." And with that parting shot, contradicted by one of the winning smiles which he had inherited from his delightful but unscrupulous father, Nicholas Kenyon took Graham's arm and these two walked away in high spirits.

When the cab stopped at the high building on the corner of Gramercy Park, its door was opened by Ranken Townsend. "I timed you to arrive about now, my lad," he said cordially. "I took the opportunity of getting some air. It's mighty good to-night. Come right up." He continued to talk in the elevator, which had a long way to go. "Betty has gone to a party. You may meet her mother, I'm not sure. She's out at one of her meetings — she spends her life at meetings — and if she comes in tired, as she generally does, she probably won't come into the studio. However, that need only be a pleasure deferred. Do you speak? If so, she'll nail you for one of her platforms."

"I,— speak?" said Peter, with a shudder. "I'd rather be shot."

Townsend laughed, led the way into his apartment and into the studio. In the dim light of one reading lamp which stood on a small table at the side of a low divan, the room looked larger than it was. It reeked with the good ripe smell of pipe tobacco and seemed to be pervaded with the personality of the man who spent most of his life in it. One of the top windows was open and through it came the refreshing air that blew up from the Hudson. Peter caught a glimpse of the sky, which was alive with stars. It was a good

place. He liked it. Work was done there. It inspired him.

The artist took Peter's hat and coat and hung them in the alcove. Then he went across the room and turned up the light that hung over a canvas. "How d'you like it?" he asked.

Peter gave an involuntary cry. There sat Betty with her hands folded in her lap. To Peter she seemed to have been caught at the very moment when from his place at her feet he looked up at her just before he held her in his arms for the first time. Her face was alight and her eyes full of tenderness. It was an exquisite piece of work.

Townsend turned out the light. He was well pleased with its effect. Peter's face was far better than several columns of printed eulogy. "Now come and sit down," he said. "Try this mixture. It took me five years to discover it, but since then I've used no other." He threw himself on the settee and settled his untidy head among the cushions.

The light shone on Peter's strong profile, and when Townsend looked at it he saw there all that he hoped to see, and something else. There was a little smile round the boy's mouth and a look in his eyes that showed all the warmth of his heart.

"And so you love my little girl as much as that? Well, she deserves it, but please don't take her away from me yet. I can't spare her. She and my work are all I've got, and I'm not lying when I say that she comes first. Generally when a man reaches my age he has lived down his dependence on other people for

happiness and his work has become his mistress, his wife and his children. In my case that isn't so, and my little girl is the best I have. She keeps me young, Peter. She renders my disappointments almost null and void, and she encourages me not wholly to sacrifice myself to the filthy dollar — an easy temptation I can assure you. So don't be in too great a hurry to take my little bird away and build a nest for her in another tree. Does that sound very selfish to you?"

"No," said Peter; "I understand. Besides — good Lord! — I've got to work before I can make a place good enough for her. I've come back to begin."

"I see! Fine! I thought perhaps that Oxford might have taken some of the good American grit out of you. It just occurred to me that you might be going to let your father keep you while you continue to remain an undergraduate out here in life. A good many of our young men with wealthy fathers play that game, believe me."

"Yes, I know," said Peter, "but there's something in my blood,— I think it's porridge,— that urges me to do things for myself. Besides, I believe that there's a feeling of gratitude somewhere about me that makes me want to pay back my father for all that he's done. I'm most awfully keen to do that, Mr. Townsend! His money has come by accident. I'm not going to take advantage of it. I'm going to start in just as if he were the same hard-working doctor that he used to be when he sent me to Harvard, skinning himself to do so. I think he'll like that. Anyway, that's my

plan. And as to Oxford,— well, I should have to be a pretty rotten sort of a dog if I didn't gain something there — that wonderful place out of which men have gone, for centuries, all the better for having rushed over its quads and churned up the water of its little old river and stood humbly in its chapels. Don't you think so?"

"I do indeed, my dear lad; but somehow or other the younger generation doesn't seem to take advantage of those things, and the sight of the young men of the present day and their callous acceptance of their fathers' efforts make me thank God that I never had a boy. I should be afraid. Think of that! What are you going to do, Peter? What is your line of work?"

"The law."

"The law? Well, I guess that's a queer sort of maze to put yourself into. An honest man in the law is like a rabbit in a dog kennel. Is that your definite decision?"

"Absolutely," said Peter. "I chose the law for that reason. I think that honesty is badly needed in it. I've got a dream that one of these days I shall be a judge and make things a bit easier for all the poor devils who have made mistakes."

"God help you!"

"I shall ask him to," said Peter.

The artist looked up quickly. In his further keen and rather wistful scrutiny of the great big square-shouldered man with the strong, clean jaw-line and the firm mouth there was a little astonishment. "Do

you mean to tell me that in the middle of these queer undisciplined, individualistic times you believe in God?"

The room remained in silence for a moment, until Peter leaned forward and knocked out his pipe. "If I didn't believe in God," he replied quietly, "would you be quite so ready to trust Betty to me?"

At that moment the door was swung open and a tall, stout, hard-bosomed woman with a mass of white hair and the carriage of a battleship sailed in. Her evening clothes glistened with sequins and many large beads rattled as she came forward. She wore a string of pearls and several diamond rings. Unable to fight any longer against advancing years and preserve what had evidently been quite remarkable good looks, she had cultivated a presence and developed distinction. In any meeting of women she was inevitably voted to the chair, and in the natural order of things became president of all the Societies to which she attached herself, except one. In this isolated case the woman who supplanted her, for the time being, was even taller, stouter and harder of bosom,— in fact, a born president.

The two men rose.

"Ah, Ranken, still up, then! I half-expected to find the studio in darkness. You'll be glad to hear that we passed a unanimous resolution to-night condemning this country as a republic and asking that it shall become a monarchy forthwith."

Townsend refrained from looking at Peter. "Indeed!" he said gravely. "An evening well spent.

But I want you to know Peter Guthrie, Dr. Hunter Guthrie's eldest son, just home from Oxford."

Mrs. Townsend extended a large well-formed hand. "Let me see! What do I know about you? You're the young man who — Oh, now I remember. You're engaged to Betty. But before I forget it, and as you are just out of Oxford, I'll put you down to speak at the annual meeting next Tuesday at the Waldorf, of the Society for the Reconstruction of University Systems. Your subject will be 'Oxford as a Menace to the Younger Generation.' There will be no fee — I beg your pardon?"

Peter's face was a study in conflicting emotions. He looked like a lonely man being run away with in a car that he was wholly unable to drive. Townsend turned a burst of laughter into a rasping cough. "You're awfully kind," said Peter, almost stammering. "But I believe in Oxford."

"Ah! Then you shall say so to the Society for the Encouragement of Universities, on Thursday at eight sharp, at the St. Mary's Public School Building, Brooklyn."

"As a matter of fact, I don't speak," said Peter. "I — I never speak."

"Why, then, you shall be one of the chief thinkers at the bi-monthly meeting of the Californian Cogitators. I'm not going to let you off, so make up your mind to that. And now I'm going to bed. I'm as tired as a dog. Good-bye, Paul,— I mean Peter. Expect me to call you up one day soon. There's so much to do with this world chaos that we must all put our

hands to the wheel." And with a wave of her hand, Mrs. Townsend sailed majestically away.

Peter gasped for breath and the artist subsided into the divan and gave way to an attack — a very spasm — of laughter, which left him limp and weak.

"Never allow Betty to get bitten by the meeting-bug, son," he said, when he had recovered. "It isn't any fun to be married to a bunch of pamphlets. What! Are you off now?"

"I'm afraid I've kept you up, as it is, Mr. Townsend. I — I want to thank you for your immense kindness to me. I shall always remember it. Good night!"

Rankin Townsend got up, stood in front of Peter for a moment and looked straight at him. He was serious again. "Good night, my dear lad," he said. "I feel that I can trust Betty to you and that takes a load off my mind. Come often and stay later."

Peter walked all the way home along Madison Avenue. That part, at any rate, of the great sleepless city was resting and quiet, and the boy's quick footsteps echoed through the empty street. He was glad to be back again in New York — glad and thankful. Somewhere, in one of her big buildings, was his love-girl — the woman who was to be his wife — the reason of his having been born into the world. No wonder he believed in God.

VII

THE following afternoon Peter was to call at the apartment-house on Gramercy Park at half-past-four. He had arranged to take Betty for a walk,— a good long tramp. There were heaps of things that he wanted to tell her and hear, and several points on which he wanted to ask her advice. He was not merely punctual, as becomes a man who is head over heels in love — he was ten minutes before his time. All the same, he found Betty waiting for him in the hall, talking to a big burly Irishman who condescended to act as hall-porter and who looked not unlike a brigadier-general in his rather over-smart uniform. This man had known Betty for many years and watched her grow up; had received many kindnesses from her and had seen her bend by the hour over the cot of his own little girl when she was ill. His face was a study when he saw Peter bound into the place, catch sight of Betty and take her in his arms, and without a single touch of self-consciousness pour out a burst of incoherent joy at being with her once more.

Catching his expression, in which surprise, resentment and a sort of jealousy were all mixed, Betty said, when she got a chance: "Peter, this is a friend of mine, Mr. O'Grady."

Peter turned and held out his hand. "How are you? All Miss Townsend's friends have got to be my friends now."

The Irishman's vanity was greatly appealed to by

the simple manliness of Peter's greeting, his cheery smile and his utter lack of side. He smiled back and, having given the hand a warm grip, drew himself up and saluted. At one time he had served in the British Army, and he wanted Peter to know it. He would have told him the story of his life then and there with, very likely, a few picturesque additions, but before he could arrange his opening sentence the two young people were out in the street. He watched them go off together, the one so broad and big, the other so slight and sweet, and said to himself, rolling a new quid of tobacco between his fingers: "Ah, thin; it's love's young dream once more! And it's a man he is. God bless both of them!"

"Are you feeling strong to-day, darling?" asked Peter.

"Strong as a lion," said Betty. "Why?"

"Because I'm going to walk you up the Avenue and into the Park and about six times round the reservoir. Can you stand it?"

Betty laughed. "Try me, and if I faint from exhaustion you can carry me into the street and call a taxi-cab. I'm not afraid of anything with you."

"That's fine! This is the first time we've been really alone since I came back. It'll take from now until the middle of next week to tell you even half the things I've got to say. First of all, I love you."

"*Darling* Peter."

"I love you more than I ever did. much more — a hundred times more — and I don't care who hears me

say so." That was true. He made this statement, not in a whisper, but in his natural voice, and it was overheard by several passers-by who turned their heads,— and being women, smiled sympathetically and went on their way with the deep thrill of the young giant's voice ringing in their ears like music.

They stood for a moment on the curbstone trying to find an opportunity to cross the street. Betty gave herself up to the masterly person at her side without a qualm. She adored being led by the arm through traffic which she wouldn't have dared to dodge had she been alone. It gave her a new and splendid sense of security and dependence.

The rain had begun to fall softly. It gathered strength as they turned into Fifth Avenue, and came down smartly. Betty didn't intend to say a word about the fact that she was wearing a new hat. It had escaped Peter's notice. Her face was all he saw. He wasn't even aware that it was raining until he took her arm and found her sleeve was wet.

"Good Lord!" he said. "This won't do. Dash this rain, it's going to spoil our walk. Where can we go? I know." A line of taxis was standing on a stand. He opened the door of the first one. "Pop in, baby," he said. "We'll drive to the Ritz and have tea. I can't have you getting wet."

Betty popped in, not really so profoundly sorry to escape that strenuous walk as Peter was.

Being a wise man he took full advantage of the taxi-cab, and for all the fact that it was broad daylight and that anybody who chose could watch him, he gave

Betty a series of kisses which did something to make up for lost time and a long separation. The new hat suffered rather in the process, but what did that matter? This was love. Hats could be replaced — such a love as his, never.

"Your father is a great chap," said Peter. "We had a good yarn last night. By Jove! I wish my father had something of his friendly way. I felt that there was nothing I couldn't tell him — nothing that he wouldn't understand. Well, well; there it is. Graham and I will have to worry along as best we may. Everything'll come out all right, I hope."

"How did you like mother?" asked Betty.

"Well," said Peter, considering his answer with the greatest care, "she's undoubtedly a wonderful woman, but she scares me to death. The very first thing she did was to ask me to speak at one of her meetings."

Betty burst out laughing. "What —? Already? When are you speaking? What are you going to say?"

"Good Lord! What can I say? I can recite the Jabberwocky or the alphabet in English, French and American, but that finishes my repertory. Can you see me standing on a platform as white as a sheet trying to stammer out a few idiotic sentences to a room full of women? Look here! You've got to get it out of her head that I can be of the slightest use to her. Tell her I stutter, or that I've got no roof to my mouth — anything you like — but, for goodness sake, have my name taken off her list. Will you promise that?

Already I wake up in the middle of the night in an absolute panic."

"Don't worry," said Betty, "Mother's a very strong-minded woman, but she's awfully easy to manage. And now I want you to promise me something."

"Anything in the world," said Peter.

"Well, then, don't mistake the Ritz for that dear little open place where the fairies dance, and suddenly kiss me in front of the band and all the people having tea."

"Hard luck," said Peter. "I'll do the best I can. But you're such an angel and you look so frightfully nice that I shall have all I can do to keep sane."

The cab drew up and they got out, went through the silly swinging doors which separate a man from his girl for a precious moment and into the Palm Court where the band was playing. Peter gave his hat and stick to a disgruntled waiter, who would have told him to check them outside but for his height and width.

The place was extraordinarily full for the time of year. Everywhere there were women, and every one of them was wearing some sort of erect feather in her hat. It gave the place the appearance of a large chicken run after a prolonged fracas. The band was playing the emotional music of *La Bohème*. It was in its best form. The waiter led them to a little table under a mimic window-sill which was crowded with plants. Many heads turned after them as they adventured between the chattering groups. It was so

easy to see that their impending marriage had been arranged in Heaven.

"What sort of tea do you like?" asked Peter. "Anything hot and wet, or have you a choice? Really, I don't know the difference between one and another."

But Betty did. Hadn't she kept house for her father? "Orange Pekoe tea," she said, "and buttered toast."

Peter made it so, and in sitting down nearly knocked over the table. He was too big for such places and his legs got in the way of everything. At the other end of the room Kenyon was sitting with Belle. Betty had seen them at once, but she held her peace. For the first time in her life she appreciated the fact that two is company. Both men were too occupied to recognize anybody.

Peter was very happy and full of enthusiasm about everything, and Betty was an eager listener as he talked about her and himself and the future, while she poured out the tea. It was all very delightful and domestic and new and exhilarating, and it didn't require much imagination on the part of either of them to believe that they were sitting in their own house, far away from people, and that Peter had just come home after a long day's work, and that the band was their new Victrola performing in the corner. Only one thing made Betty aware of the fact that they were in the Ritz Hotel, and that was the pattern of the teacups. She never would have chosen such things, and if they had been given to her as a wedding present she would

have packed them away in some far-off cupboard. She had already made up her mind that their first tea service was going to be blue-and-white, because it would go with her drawing-room,— the drawing-room which she had furnished in her dreams.

"I don't think you'd better do that, Peter," whispered Betty suddenly.

"Do what, darling?" Butter wouldn't have melted in his mouth.

"Why, hold my hand. Everybody can see."

"Not if you put it behind this end of the tablecloth. Besides, what if they can? I'm not ashamed of being in love. Are you?"

"No; I glory in it. But ——"

"But what?" He held it tighter.

"I think you'd better give it back to me. There's an old lady frowning."

"Oh, she's only a poor benighted spinster. And anyhow she's not frowning. She put her eyebrows on in the dark."

"Very well, Peter. I suppose you know best." And Betty made no further attempts to rescue her hand.

She had two good reasons for leaving it there,— the first, that she liked it, and the second that she couldn't take it away. But she made sure that it was hidden by the tablecloth.

"Won't you smoke, Peter?"

"Oh, thanks. May I?"

"All the other men are."

Peter took out his case and his cigarette holder.

It was very easy to take out a cigarette with one hand, but for the life of him he couldn't manœuvre it into the tube. Was he so keen to smoke that he would let her hand go?

He gave it up and broke into a smile that almost made Betty bend forward and plant a resounding kiss on his square chin. "Well, I'm dashed," he said. "I believe you asked me to smoke on purpose to get free."

"I did," she said. "Peter, you're — you're just a darling."

And that was why he upset the glass of water.

Presently he said, when peace was restored: "What d'you think I've done to-day? I've fixed up a seat in the law office of two friends of mine. They were at Harvard with me — corkers both. I intend to start work next week. Isn't that fine? We're going to mop up all the work in the city. Darling, that apartment of ours is getting nearer and nearer. I shall be a tired business man soon and shall want a home to go to, with a little wife waiting for me."

And Betty said: "How soon do you think that'll be?"

Before Peter could answer, Belle's ringing voice broke in. She and Kenyon had come up unnoticed. "The turtle doves," she said. "Isn't it beautiful, Nick?"

"Well, rather!"

And the spell was broken. They little knew, these two who were so happy, that in the fertile brain of the

man who stood smiling at them was the germ of a plan which would break their engagement and bring a black cloud over the scene.

VIII

The family dined early that evening. Graham had taken a box at the Maxine Elliott Theatre. He and Kenyon and Peter were to take Belle and Betty there to see a play by Edward Sheldon, about which everybody was talking. Little Mrs. Guthrie, who was to have been one of the party, had decided to stay at home, because the Doctor was not feeling very well, and so she was going to sit with him in the library and see that he went to bed early, and give him a dose of one of those old-fashioned cures in which she was a great believer.

Naturally enough, although he was not an ardent play-goer, Peter was looking forward with keen pleasure to the evening because he would be able to sit close to Betty and from time to time whisper in her ear. During dinner, however, which was a very merry meal, with Kenyon keeping everyone in fits of laughter, Peter caught something in his mother's eyes which made him revolutionize his plans. The little mother laughed as frequently as the rest of them,— to the casual observer she was merry and bright, with nothing on her mind except the slight indisposition of the Doctor. But Peter, who possessed an intuitive eye which had a knack of seeing underneath the surface

of things and whose keen sympathy for those he loved was very easily stirred, became aware of the fact that his mother was only simulating light-heartedness and stood in need of something from him.

He threw his mind back quickly, and in a moment knew what was wrong. During the short time that he had been back in the city he had forgotten to give his little mother anything of himself. That was wrong and ungrateful and extremely selfish, and must be remedied at once.

Without a moment's hesitation he decided to cut two acts of the play and do everything that he could to prove to the little mother who meant so much to him that, although he was engaged to be married, she still retained her place in his heart.

Dinner over, he went quickly to the door and opened it, and as his mother passed out he put his arm round her shoulders and whispered, "Mummie, dear, slip up to your room and wait there for me. I want to talk to you." The look of gratitude that he received from the dear little woman was an immense reward for his unselfishness. Then he went up to Graham and said: "Look here, old boy, I find I shan't be able to go along with you now, but I'll join you for the last act."

"Oh, rot!" said Graham. "What's up? Betty'll be awfully upset."

"No, she won't," said Peter. "I'm going to send her a note." And while the others were getting ready, he dashed off a few lines to the girl who, like himself, understood the family feeling. It contained only a

few lines, but they were characteristically Peterish and were calculated to make Betty add one more brick to the beautiful construction of her love for him, because they showed that he understood women and their sensitiveness and realized their urgent need of tenderness and appreciation.

As soon as the party had driven away, Peter collected a pipe and a tin of tobacco and went quickly up the wide staircase. He rushed into his mother's own particular room with all his old impetuosity and found her sitting at a table by the side of a great workbasket in which he saw a large collection of the socks that he had brought home with him and which stood badly in need of motherly attention. No man in this world made so many or such quick holes in the toes of his socks as Peter did, and he knew that she had ransacked the drawers to find them. He drew up a chair, thrust his long legs out in front of him and made himself completely comfortable.

This little room was unlike any other in the house. In it his mother had placed all the pet pieces of inexpensive furniture which had been in the sitting-room of the little house in which she and the Doctor had settled down when they were first married. It was unpretentious stuff, bought in a cheap store in a small town,— what is called "Mission" furniture,— curious, uncomfortable-looking chairs which creaked with every movement, odd little sideboards, which would have brought a grin either of pain or amusement to the face of the former owner of the beautifully furnished house which had been left to the Doctor. The

walls were covered with photographs of the family in all stages,— Peter as a chubby baby with a great curl on top of his head — Belle in a perambulator smiling widely at a colored nurse — Graham in his first sailor-suit — Ethel bravely arrayed in a party frock, "Thinking of Mother"— and over the mantel-piece one — an enlargement — of the Doctor taken when he was a young man, with an unlined face and thick, straight hair, his jaws set with that grim determination which had carried him over so many obstacles. It was a room at which Graham, Belle and Ethel frequently laughed. But Peter liked it and respected it. He felt more at home there than anywhere else in the house. It reminded him of the early struggles of his father and mother and touched every responsive note in his nature.

"I'm sorry you're not going to the theatre, dear," said Mrs. Guthrie.

"No, you're not," said Peter.

"Oh, indeed I am. I like you to enjoy yourself with the others, and Betty'll be there. Only stay a few minutes; and, as the curtain always goes up late, you'll be in time to see the whole of the play."

"Blow the play!" said Peter. "I'm going to talk to you just as long as I like. I can go to the theatre any night of the week."

Mrs. Guthrie dropped her work, bent forward and put her cheek against Peter's. "You're a dear, dear boy," she said. "You're my very own Peter, and even if I were a poet I couldn't find words to tell you how happy you make me; but I did my best not to let

you see that I was just a wee bit hurt because you haven't had time to spare me a few moments since you came home. After all, I'm only a little old mother now, and I must try to remember that."

"Oh, don't," said Peter. "I'm awfully sorry I've been such a thoughtless brute. But, no one — no, no one — can ever take your place, and you know it." He went down on his knees at her side and wrapped his strong arms round her and put his head upon her breast as he used to do when he was a little chap, and remained there for a while perfectly happy.

He couldn't see the Madonna look which came into the eyes of the little mother, whose pillow had frequently been wet with tears at the thought that she had lost her boy. Nor did he see the expression of extreme gratitude which spread rather pathetically over her face. But he felt these things and held her tightly just to show how well he understood, and to eliminate from her heart that feeling of pain which he knew had crept into it because he had found that other little mother who was to be his wife and have sons of her own.

Presently he returned to his chair and to his pipe, and began to talk. "By gad!" he said, "it's good to be home again. I find myself looking at everything differently now — quite time, too. I should have been at work years ago. Universities are great places and *I* shall never regret Oxford, but they take a long time to prepare a fellow to become a man." Then he laughed one of his great and big laughs, and his chair creaked and one or two of the old pieces of furniture

seemed to rattle. "I hid those socks, but I knew you'd find them. What a mother you are, mother! I'll make a bet with you."

"I never bet," said Mrs. Guthrie, who was all smiles.

"I'll bet you a hundred dollars you never mend Graham's socks. Now then tell the truth."

"Well, no, I don't. He doesn't like socks that have been mended; and, anyway, he isn't my first-born. You see that makes a lot of difference."

"There you are," said Peter. "Pay up and smile. Oh, say; I'm sorry father's seedy. He sticks too closely to those microbes of his. I shall try to screw up courage and take him on a bust now and then. It'll do him good. Think he'll go?"

Mrs. Guthrie looked up eagerly. "Try," she said. "Please do try. Now that you've come home for good I want you to do everything you can to get closer to your father. He's a splendid man and he's always thinking about you and the others, but I know that he'll never make the first move. He doesn't seem to understand how to do it. But he deserves everything you can give him. If only you could break down his shyness and diffidence,— because that's what it is,— you'd make him very happy."

"Yes, that's what I think," said Peter. "I've been thinking it over, especially since I saw the way in which Kenyon's father treats him. I shall pluck up courage one of these nights, beard him in his den and have it out, and put things straight. I want him much more than he wants me; and, d'you know, I think that Graham wants him too."

"I'm sure he does," said Mrs. Guthrie. "Graham's a good boy, but he's very reckless and thinks that he's older than he is. He comes to me sometimes with his troubles, but how can I help him? I wish, Peter, I do wish that he'd go sometimes to his father!"

"Well, I'm going to try to alter all that," said Peter. "It's got to be done somehow. Father's always been afraid of us, and we've always been afraid of father. It's silly. What d'you think of Nicholas? Isn't he a corker?"

Mrs. Guthrie smiled. "He improves on acquaintance," she said. "He's certainly one of the most charming men I've ever met. Do you think"—she lowered her voice a little—"do you think there's anything between him and Belle?"

"Good Lord!" said Peter. "I never thought of that. Is there?"

"Well," said Mrs. Guthrie, "I've noticed one or two little things. He's been writing to her, you know."

"Has he? By Jove! Well, then, there must be something in it. He's a lazy beggar and I don't believe I've ever seen him write a letter in his life. Gee, I shall be awfully glad to have him for a brother-in-law! That topping place in Shropshire! Belle would make an absolutely perfect mistress of it, although there's plenty of life in the old man yet. By Jove, it was good to see the relationship between Nick and his father. It staggered me. Why, they were as good as friends. They go about arm in arm and tell each other everything. It used to make me feel quite

sick sometimes. Think of my going about arm in arm with father!"

"Think of Belle becoming the Countess of Shropshire! I should like that. It would be another feather in your father's cap,— your father who used to carry siphons in a basket."

"More power to his elbow," said Peter. "It might have been better for me if I'd carried siphons in a basket. After all, I'm inclined to believe that there's no university in the world like the streets. Think of all the men who've graduated from windy corners and muddy gutters — It'd be a fine thing for Ethel, too, if Belle marries Nick. Isn't she an extraordinary kid? Upon my word, she takes my breath away. She's older at sixteen than most women are at thirty. By the way, what's the matter with her? What's anæmia, anyhow? She looks as fit as a fiddle."

"Oh, she'll soon get over that," said Mrs. Guthrie. "I think they bend too much over books at her school. You know the modern girl isn't like the girls of my generation. I didn't have to learn geometry or piano playing. I didn't think it was necessary to know Euclid or a smattering of the classics. We learned how to make bread and cook a good steak and iron clothes. You know husbands don't come home to hear Mozart on a Baby Grand and enter into discussions about writers with crack-jaw names."

"I know,— Ibsen, Schopenhauer, Hauptmann and Tolstoy. No; they don't fill a hungry tummie, do they?"

"No, indeed they don't," said Mrs. Guthrie. "And

that reminds me that I must go and give your father his little dose. When a doctor isn't well he never knows how to look after himself." She got up and put down her work, and then bent over Peter. "Thank you for coming up to-night, my dearest boy. I've had a queer little pain in my heart for a long time, but you've taken it all away. Now run along and see your Betty, and don't worry about your little mother any longer."

Peter got up and put his hands on his mother's shoulders. "Listen!" he said. "I love you. I shall always love you. No woman shall ever come between me and you." And he caught her in his arms and kissed her.

And then she bustled down-stairs to the library, where the Doctor was taking it easy for once and dipping into one of the numerous books that surrounded him. There was a smile on Mrs. Guthrie's face which was like the sun on an autumn morning.

On the way to his bedroom Peter passed the door of Ethel's room, and drew up short. He had heard her say she was going to bed early. He hadn't had many words with her since he got back. So he decided to go in and wipe off that debt, too. When he tried to open the door he found that it was locked. He started a devil's tattoo with his knuckles. "Are you there, Kid?" he shouted out.

The answer was "Yes."

"Well, then, open the door. I want to come in."

After a moment the door was opened and Ethel stood there in a very becoming peignoir. She looked

extremely disconcerted and did her best to block the way into the room.

But that wouldn't do for Peter. "What's all this?" he asked. "We lock our door now, do we?"

"Yes, sometimes," said Ethel. "Why aren't you at the theatre?" She shot a surreptitious glance towards the window, which was open.

"I've been having a talk with mother," said Peter. "Hello! I see you've been trigging up your room. Frightfully swagger now, isn't it. New art, eh? You're coming on, my dear, there's no mistake about that. I'm afraid you find us all appallingly provincial, don't you?"

The broad grin on Peter's face was no new thing to Ethel. He had always pulled her leg and treated her as though she were a sort of freak. All the same, she liked his coming in and was flattered to know that he thought it worth while to bother about her. But she began to edge him to the door. He had come at a most unpropitious moment.

"Oh ho!" said Peter. "So this's what higher education does for you? A nice mixture — cigarettes and candies — I must say. Now I know why you locked your door. With a marshmallow in one hand and an Egyptian Beauty in the other you lie on your sofa in the latest thing in peignoirs and see life through the pages of,— what?" He picked up a book from the table. "Good Lord!" he added; "you don't mean to say you stuff this piffle into you?" It was a collection of plays by Strinberg.

"Oh, go to the theatre!" said Ethel. "You're being horridly Oxford now and I hate it."

"You'll get a lot more of it before I've done with you," said Peter. "All the same, you look very nice, my dear. I'm very proud of you, and I hope you will do me the honour to be seen about with me sometimes. But how about taking some of that powder off your nose? If you begin trying to hide it at sixteen it'll be lost altogether at twenty." He made a sudden pounce at her and holding both her hands so that she could not scratch, rubbed all the powder away from her little proud nose and made for the door, just missing the cushion which came flying after him, and took himself and his big laugh along the passage.

Immensely relieved at being left alone, Ethel locked the door again and went over to her dressing-table, where she repaired damage with quick, deft fingers. With another glance at the window,— a glance in which there was some impatience,— she arranged herself on the settee to wait.

IX

No wonder Peter had made remarks about this room. It was deliciously characteristic of its owner. Large and airy; all its furniture was white and its hangings were of creamy cretonne covered with little rosebuds. The narrow bed was tucked away in a corner so that the writing-desk, the sofa and the revolving book-stand — on which stood a bowl of mammoth

chrysanthemums — might dominate the room. Several mezzotints of Watts' pictures hung on the walls and a collection of framed illustrations of the Arabian Nights, by Dulac. The whole effect was one of naïve sophistication.

Through the open window the various sounds of the city's activity floated rather pleasantly. There was even a note of cheerfulness in the insistent bells of the trolley-cars on Madison Avenue and the chugging of a taxi-cab on the other side of the street. Before many minutes had gone by a rope ladder dangled outside the window, and this was followed immediately afterwards by the lithe and wiry figure of a boy. Wearing a rather sheepish expression he remained sitting on the sill, swinging his legs. "Hello!" said he. "How are you feeling?"

"There's some improvement to-night," said Ethel. "Won't you come in? Were you waiting for a signal?"

"You bet!"

He was a nice boy, with a frank, honest face, a blunt nose and a laughing mouth. His hair was dark and thick, and his shoulders square. He was eighteen and he looked every day of it. He lived next door and was the son of a man who owned a line of steamships and a French mother, who was not on speaking terms with Mrs. Guthrie, owing to the fact that the Doctor had been obliged to remonstrate about her parrot. This expensive prodigy gave the most lifelike and frequent imitations of cats, trolley-cars, newsboys, sirens and other superfluous and distressing disturb-

ances on the window-sill of the room which was next to his laboratory. So this boy and girl — unconsciously playing all over again the story of the Montagues and Capulets — met surreptitiously night after night, the boy coming over the roof and using the rope ladder — which had played its part in all the great romances. Was there any harm in him? Well, he was eighteen.

"What'll you have first?" asked Ethel, in her best hostess manner —"candies or cigarettes?"

"Both," said the boy; and with a lump in his cheek and an expression of admiration in both eyes he started a cigarette. He was about to sit on the settee at Ethel's feet, but she pointed to a chair and into this he subsided, crossing one leg over the other and hitching his trousers rather high so that he might display to full advantage a pair of very smart socks, newly purchased.

"I hope you locked your bedroom door," said Ethel, "and please don't forget to whisper. There's no chance of our being caught, but we may as well be careful."

The boy nodded and made a little face. "If father found out about this," he said; "oh, Gee! What did you do with Ellen after she bounced in last night?"

"Oh, I gave her one of my hats. I told her that if she kept quiet there was a frock waiting for her. She's safe. Now, amuse me!"

For some minutes the boy remained silent, worrying his brain as to how to comply with the girl's rather difficult and peremptory request. He knew that she

was not easy to amuse. He was a little frightened at the books she read and looked up to her with a certain amount of awe. He liked her best when she said nothing and was content to sit quite quiet and look pretty. After deep and steady thought he took a chance. "Do you know this one?" he asked, and started whistling a new ragtime through his teeth.

It was new to Ethel. She liked it. Its rhythm set her feet moving. "Oh, that's fine," she said. "What are the words?"

The boy was a gentleman. He shook his head, thereby stimulating her curiosity a hundred-fold.

"Oh don't be silly. I shall know them sooner or later, whatever they are — besides, I'm not a child."

The boy lied chivalrously. "Well, honestly, I don't know them,— something about 'Row, row, row'— I don't know the rest."

She knew that he did know. She liked him for not telling her the truth, but she made a mental note to order the song the following morning.

And so, for about an hour, these two young things who imagined that this was life carried on a desultory conversation, while the boy gradually filled the room with cigarette smoke, and remained reluctantly a whole yard away from the sofa. It was all very childish and simple, but to them it was romance with a very big R. They were making believe that they had thrown the world back about a hundred years or so. He was a knight and she a lady in an enemy's castle; and, although their mothers didn't speak, they liked to ignore the fact that Mrs. Guthrie would have had no objec-

tion to his coming to tea as often as he desired and taking Ethel for walks in broad daylight whenever he wished for a little mild exercise. But,— he was eighteen, and so presently, repulsed by her tongue but enticed by her eyes, he left his chair and found himself sitting on the settee at Ethel's feet, holding her hand, which thrilled him very much. She was kinder than usual that night, sweeter and more girlish. Her stockings were awfully pretty, too, and her hair went into more than usually delicious ripples round her face.

"You're a darling," he said suddenly. "I love to come here like this. I hope you'll be ill for a month." And he slid forward with gymnastic clumsiness and put his arm round her shoulder. He was just going to kiss her and so satisfy an overwhelming craving when there was a soft knock on the door and Dr. Guthrie's voice followed it. "Are you awake, Ethel?"

The boy sprang to his feet, stood for a moment with a look of peculiar shame on his face, turned on his heels, made for the window, went through it like a rabbit and up the troubadour ladder, which disappeared after him.

Ethel held her breath and remained transfixed. Again the knock came and the question was repeated. But she made no answer, and presently, when the sound of footsteps died away, she got up — a little peevish and more than a little irritable — kicked a small pile of cigarette ash which the boy had dropped upon her carpet, and said to herself: "*Just* as he was going to kiss me! Goodness, how *annoying* father is!"

X

THE following morning Belle took Nicholas Kenyon for a walk. Dressed in a suit of blue flannel with white bone buttons, with a pair of white spats gleaming over patent leather shoes and a grey hat stuck at an angle of forty-five, Kenyon looked as fresh and as dapper as though he had been to bed the night before at ten o'clock. He had, as a matter of fact, come home with the milk; but he was one of those men who possess the enviable gift of looking healthy and untired after the sort of nights which make the ordinary man turn to chemistry and vibro-massage.

Belle had sported a new hat for the occasion.

This fact Kenyon realized with that queer touch of intuition which was characteristic of him. "By Jove!" he said. "That's something like a hat, Belle. Hearty congratulations. You suit it to perfection."

Belle beamed upon him. "But you would say that anyhow, wouldn't you?"

"Perfectly true; but in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred I shouldn't mean it."

They turned into Madison Avenue. It was an exquisite morning. The whole city was bathed in sun, but the refreshing tang of late autumn was in the air. Most of the large houses were still closed, their owners lingering in the country or abroad. All the same there was the inevitable amount of traffic in the streets and apparently the usual number of passers-by. The city can be — according to the strange little creatures

who write society news —" utterly deserted " and yet contain all its teeming millions.

" And what may that be? " asked Kenyon, pointing to the heavy white buttresses of a church which backed on the street.

" Oh, that's the Roman Catholic Cathedral."

" Roman Catholic, eh? I noticed churches everywhere as we drove up from the docks,— more churches than pubs apparently, and yet I suppose it would be quite absurd to imagine that New Yorkers imbibe their alcohol entirely in the form of religion."

" Quite," said Belle, dryly. " Although we have a hundred religions and only five cocktails."

" I see you also go in for antique furniture."

Belle laughed. " You have a quick eye," she said. " There's so much genuine Old English stuff in this city that if it were sent to England there wouldn't be room for it on shore. Tell me; what are your plans? "

" Well," said Kenyon, " I'm going to accept your father's perfectly charming hospitality for a fortnight and then take rooms in a bachelor apartment-house, of which Graham has told me, for the winter."

" You're going to settle down here? " cried Belle.

" Rather,— for six months. I'm here to study the conditions, make myself familiar with the characteristics and draw from both what I hope will be the foundations of much usefulness." Kenyon considered that he had enveloped his true mission — which was to lighten the pockets of all unwary young men — with a satirical verbiage that did him credit.

"I thought that perhaps you'd come for some other reason," said Belle, whose whole face showed her disappointment.

Kenyon shot a quick glance at her. How naïve she was — how very much too easy — but, nevertheless, how very young and desirable. "That goes without saying, you delicious thing," he replied, closing his hand warmly round her arm for a moment and so bringing the light back to her eyes. "By the way," he continued, "what's the matter with Graham?"

"I don't know that anything's the matter with Graham."

"I think so. I notice a worried look about him that he didn't have at Oxford; that he seems to be always on the verge of telling me something, and drawing back at the last minute. I must make a point of finding out what his trouble is. Peter and I were discussing it this morning after breakfast. We're both a bit anxious about him. Do you know if your father has noticed it?"

"Father? Oh, he doesn't notice anything. He believes that Graham is working very hard and doing well. He knows less about what goes on in our house than the people who live next door."

"That's rather a pity. I'm all for complete confidence between father and son. However, I shall play father to Graham for a bit and see what can be done for him. He puzzles me. There's a mystery somewhere."

Something of this mystery was disclosed to Kenyon and Peter that night. After dining them both

at the Harvard Club — a place which filled Kenyon with admiration and surprise — Graham suddenly suggested, with a queer touch of excitement, that they should go with him to his apartment.

"Your apartment?" said Peter. "What on earth do you mean?"

"Well, come and see," said Graham.

The two elder men looked at each other in amazement. Kenyon's quick mind ran ahead, but Peter, the unsophisticated, was quite unable to understand what in the world Graham wanted an apartment for when he lived at home. They all three left West Forty-fourth Street in silence and walked arm in arm down Fifth Avenue as far as Twenty-eighth Street. Here they turned westward and followed Graham, who was wearing an air of rather sheepish pride, up the steps of an old brown stone house with rather a shabby portico.

"Dismal looking hole," said Peter.

"Wait!" said Graham, and he put his finger on a bell. The door opened automatically and he led the way into a scantily furnished hall and up three flights of stairs, whose red carpet was in the autumn of its days. Drawing up in front of a door on the left of the passage he rang again, and after a lengthy pause was admitted to a small apartment by a colored maid, who gave a wide grin of recognition.

"Come right in," said Graham. "Lily, take our hats and coats. Don't leave them about in the hall. Hang them up and then go and get some drinks."

Kenyon looked about him curiously. He could see

that the place was newly furnished and that everything had been chosen by a man. He glanced into the dining-room. The pictures were sporting and the furniture mission. He detected no sign of a woman's hand anywhere. He began to be puzzled. He had expected to find something quite different. But when Graham opened the door of the sitting-room and said: "Well, here we are, Ita!" and he saw a small, dark, olive-skinned girl rise up from a settee and run forward to Graham with a little cry of welcome, he knew that his deduction of the situation had been a right one. So this was the mystery.

Still with the same air of sheepish pride, Graham said: "Peter, this is Miss Ita Strabosck. My brother, Ita. And this is Nicholas Kenyon, who's a great friend of mine. They've just come over from England, and so of course I've brought them to see you."

The little girl held out a very shy hand, and said: "I am so glad. Eet ees very good of you to come."

In a curiously plain tight frock of some soft black material, cut square across her tiny breasts, and leaving her arms bare almost to the shoulders, she stood, with one knee bent, looking from one man to the other with a sort of wistful eagerness to be treated kindly. She held a tiny black Teddy bear with red eyes against her cheek, like a child.

Peter, for a reason which he was unable to explain to himself, felt a wave of sympathy go over him. He not only accepted the girl on her face value, but some-

how or other believed her to be younger and more romantic than she looked. She seemed to him to have stepped out of the pages of some Arabian book — to be a little exotic whom Graham must have discovered far away from her native hot-house. He liked the way in which her thick hair was arranged round her face, and he would have sworn that she was without guile.

Not so Kenyon. "Great Scott!" he said to himself. "Here's a little devil for you. Our young friend Graham has had his leg pulled. I've seen mosquitoes before, but the poison of this one will take all the ingenuity of an expert to counteract."

He sat down and watched the girl, who threw one quick antagonistic glance at him and attached herself to Peter, to whom she talked in monosyllables. She might only very recently have left a Convent School, except that her dog-like worship of Graham seemed to prove that she owed him a deep debt of gratitude for some great service.

Graham watched her, too, and his expression showed Kenyon that even if he didn't love her he believed in her and was proud of himself.

XI

By a sort of mutual consent the three men left the apartment in Twenty-eighth Street early. They did not desire to finish the evening at any cabaret or club. They called the first passing taxicab and drove home.

By mutual consent also they never once referred to Ita Strabosck, but discussed everything else under the sun. Kenyon had never been so useful. With consummate tact — but all the while with the picture in his mind of the cunning little actress whom they had just left — he led the conversation from dancing to baseball and from country clubs to women's clothes. Whenever the cab passed a strong light Graham made a quick, examining glance at Peter's face. He knew old Peter as well as Peter knew his piano, and he was quite well aware of the fact that although his brother laughed a good deal at Kenyon's quaint turn of phrase he was upset at what he had seen.

It was just after eleven o'clock when they went into the smoking-room of the house in Fifty-second Street. Mrs. Guthrie and Ethel had gone to bed. Belle had not returned from a theatre party. The Doctor was at work in his laboratory. He heard the boys come in. The sound of their voices made him raise his head eagerly. He even half-rose from his chair in a desire to join them and hear them talk, and laugh with them and get from them some of that sense of youth which they exuded so pleasantly, but his terrible shyness got the better of him once more and he returned to his experiments. How ironical it was that with complete unconsciousness he was leaving it to such a man as Nicholas Kenyon to play father to his second son, who had never in his short life needed a real father so badly.

For some little time — smoking a good cigar with complete appreciation — Kenyon continued to give

forth his impressions of New York so far as he knew it. He was especially amusing in his description of the effect upon him of the first sight of the Great White Way. Then, all of a sudden, there came one of those strange pauses. It was Peter who broke the silence. "Graham, old boy," he said, "tell us about it. What does it all mean? Good Lord! you're only twenty-four. Are you married?"

Before Graham could reply, Kenyon sent out a scoffing laugh. "Married! Is he married?" he cried. "My good old grandfather's ghost, Peter! But how indescribably green you are. Hang me if you're not like a sort of Peter Pan! You've passed through Harvard and Oxford with a skin over your eyes. It's all very beautiful, very commendable — and what Belle would call 'very dear' of you — and all that sort of thing, but somehow you make me feel that I've got to go through life with you in the capacity of the sort of guide one hires in Paris — the human Baedeker."

"But if Graham hasn't married that poor girl," said Peter, bluntly, "what's he doing with her?"

Graham sprang to his feet and began to walk about the room. All about his tall, slight, well-built figure there was a curious nervousness and excitement. Even in the carefully subdued light of the room it was plain to see that his face was rather haggard and drawn. The boy looked years older than Peter. "I'll start off," he said, "by giving you fellows my word of honor that what I'm going to tell you is the truth. I have to begin like this because if either of you were

to tell me this story I don't think I should be able to believe it. Some time ago I was taken — I forget by whom — to a pestilential but rather amusing place in Fortieth Street. It's a huge studio run by a woman who calls herself Papowsky. It's what you, Nick, would call the last word in supereffeteness. Ita Strabosck was one of the girls. I liked her at once. I didn't fall in love with her, but she appealed to me and it was simply to see her that I went there several times. I knew the place was pretty rotten and I didn't cotton on to the people who were there or the things they did. I even knew that the police had their eyes on it, but I liked it all the more because of that. It gave it a sort of zest, like absinthe in whiskey."

"Quite!" said Kenyon. "Fire away!"

"The last time I went there, Ita took me into a corner, told me that she was never allowed out of the place and was a sort of White Slave, and begged me to take her away. I don't think I shall ever forget the sight of that poor little wretch trembling and shaking. It was pretty bad. Well, I took her away. I got her out by a fire-escape when nobody was watching us. Dodged through a window of a restaurant on the first floor, and so out into the street. It was very tricky work. The day after I took the apartment that you came to to-night, furnished it, and there Ita has been ever since. I go there nearly every night until the small hours. She's happy now and safe and I don't regret it. She hated the place and the things she had been forced to do and nothing will make me believe that she was bad. She was just a victim — that's all.

And if I have to go without things I don't care so long as she has all she needs. That's the story. What d'you think of it?"

Peter got up, went over to his brother and held out his hand silently. With a rather pathetic expression of gratitude in his eyes, Graham took it and held it tight. "That's like you, Peter," he said, a little huskily.

Kenyon made no movement. He looked with a pitying smile at the two boys as they stood eye to eye. The whole thing sounded to him like a fairy tale and for a moment he wondered whether Graham was not endeavoring to obtain their sympathy under false pretences. Then he made up his mind that Graham — like the man with whom he had lived at Oxford — was green also, for all that he had knocked about in New York for two years. Not from any kindness of heart, but simply because he wanted to use Graham as a means of introducing him to the young male wealthy set of the city, he determined to get him out somehow or other of this disastrous entanglement. He would however go to work tactfully without allowing Graham to think that he had made a complete fool of himself. He knew that if he wounded this boy's vanity and brought him down from his heroic pedestal he would set his teeth, put his back to the wall and refuse to be assisted. With keen insight he could see that this incident was likely to injure the usefulness of his visit to America.

"Um!" he said. "It's a pitiful story, Graham. You behaved devilish well, old boy. Not many men

would have acted so quickly and so unselfishly. Now, sit down and tell me a few things."

Gladly enough Graham did so, heaving a great sigh. He was glad that he had made a clear breast of all this. He was too young to keep it a secret. He wanted sympathy urgently and a little human help. Peter loaded and lit a pipe and drew his chair into the group.

"This girl Ita What's-her-name loves you, of course?"

Graham nodded.

"Anyone could see that," said Peter.

"But she'd been in that studio some time before you came along, I take it,— I mean she'd been anybody's property for the asking?"

Graham shuddered. "I hate to think so," he said.

Peter kicked the leg of the nearest chair.

"How d'you feel?" asked Kenyon.

"Awfully sorry for her," said Graham.

"Yes, of course. What I mean is, are *you* all right?"

Graham looked puzzled. "I find it rather difficult to pay for everything," he said, "especially as I've been damned unlucky lately."

The man of the world involuntarily raised his eyebrows. "Good Lord!" he said to himself. "And this boy is the son of a specialist. Blind — blind!" Then he spoke aloud, passing on to another point. "How long do you think it is incumbent upon you to make yourself the guardian of this girl?"

Graham shrugged his shoulders. "She comes from Poland. Her father and mother are dead and she has no one to look after her."

"I'll help you," said Peter.

That was exactly what Kenyon didn't want. He got up, went over to the table and mixed a drink. "Potter off to bed, Graham, old boy," he said. "Get a good night's rest. You need it. We'll go further into the matter in a day or two. It requires serious consideration. Anyway, I congratulate you. You're a bit of a knight, and you've my complete admiration." He led the boy to the door, patted him on the shoulder and got rid of him. Then he returned to Peter, whose face showed that he was laboring under many conflicting emotions.

"Nick," he said, "he's only twenty-four — just making a beginning. He did the only thing he could do under the circumstances, but,— but what would father say?"

"I don't think it's a question as to what your father would say," said Kenyon. "If I know anything, the way to put it is what can your father do? Of all men in the city he's the one who could be most useful in this peculiar mess-up — Peter, you and I have got to get that boy out of this, otherwise ——"

"Otherwise what?"

"Otherwise — quite shortly — the police are likely to fish out of the river the dead body of a promising lad of twenty-four, and there'll be great grief in this house."

"What d'you mean?"

"Exactly what I say. That girl's a liar, a cheat and a fraud."

"I don't believe you."

"I don't care whether you believe me or not. She's rotten from head to foot. She's as easy to read as an advertisement. She's taking advantage of a fellow who's as unsuspicious as you are. You're both green, — green, I tell you,— as green as grass."

"I'd rather be green," cried Peter, hotly, "than go through life with your rotten skepticism."

"Would you? You talk like an infant. Graham will want to marry some day,— and then what? Good Heavens! Hasn't anybody taken the trouble to tell you two any of the facts of life? You are neither of you fit to be allowed out in the streets without a nurse. It's appalling. Skeptical, you call me. You're blind, I tell you. Blind! So's the old man in the next room. There's an ugly shadow over this house, Peter, as sure as you're alive. Don't stand there glaring at me. I'm talking facts. If you've got any regard for your brother and his health and his future; if you want to save your mother from unutterable suffering and your father from a hideous awakening, don't talk any further drivel to me, but make up your mind that the girl, Ita Strasbosck, has it in her power to turn Graham into a suicide. She's a liar — a liar and a trickster and a menace — and I'll make it my business to prove it to you and Graham."

"You can't."

"Can't I? We'll see about that. And you've got to help me. We've got to make Graham see that he

must shake her off at once,— at once, I tell you. The alternative you know."

Peter got up and strode about the room. He was worried and anxious. He didn't, unfortunately, fully appreciate the gravity of this affair, because, as Kenyon had said so tauntingly, he was a child in such matters. But what he did appreciate was that his only brother had done something, however sympathetic the motive, which might have far-reaching consequences and which did away with the possibility of his going, as it was Peter's determination to go, clean and straight to a good girl.

He turned to Kenyon, who had made himself comfortable. "I'll help you for all I'm worth, Nick," he said.

"Right," said Kenyon. "I'll think out a line of action and let you know to-morrow. There's no time to be lost."

XII

Kenyon got rid of Peter, too.

Apart from the fact that he was going to wait up for Belle, he wanted to be alone. He was angry. It was just like his bad luck to come all the way to America and find that the two men who had it in their power to be of substantial use to him were both fully occupied,— one being hopelessly in love, the other in money trouble and in what he recognized as a difficult and even dangerous position. With characteristic selfishness he resented these things. They made it

necessary for him to exercise his brain,— not for himself — which was his idea of the whole art of living — but for others. There were other things that he resented also. One was the fact that Peter was what he called a damned child. He had no admiration whatever for his friend's absolute determination to look only at the clean things of life. A thousand times since they had shared the same rooms he had cursed Peter because of his sweeping refusal to discuss a question which he knew to be of vital and far-reaching importance. At these times Peter had always said something like this: "My dear Nick, I'm not going to be a doctor, a woman-hunter, or a sloppy man about town. I don't want to know any details whatever of the things which stir up other men's curiosity. I've no room in my brain for them. They don't amuse me or interest me. I'm jolly well going to remain a damned child, whether you like it or not, so you may chuck trying to drag me into these midnight discussions of yours with the men who hang nudes all over their walls and gloat over filthy little French books."

And then there was Graham. He, like untold hundreds of his type, had a certain amount of precocity, but no knowledge. He had merely peeked at the truth of things through a chink. He had looked at life with the salacious eyes of a Peeping Tom. And what was the result? Worse than total ignorance. Deep down in whatever soul he had, Nicholas Kenyon honestly and truly believed in friendship between father and son. He knew — none better — because it was his

business to observe, that a young man was frightfully and terribly handicapped who went out into the world unwarned, unadvised and uninitiated. He had often come across men like Peter and Graham whose lives had been absolutely ruined at the very outset for the reason that their fathers had either been too cowardly or too indifferent to give them the benefit of their own experience and early troubles. In fact, most of the men he knew — and he knew a great many — had been left to discover the essential truths and facts for themselves. The inevitable end of it was that they made their discoveries too late.

Fate certainly must have had a very grim amusement in watching Nicholas Kenyon as he walked up and down the library of Dr. Hunter Guthrie's house that night, blazing at the delinquencies of fathers. Nevertheless, Kenyon had the right to be indignant, whether his reasons for being so sprang out of his selfishness or not. His own father was an unscrupulous, unserious man, that was true, but at any rate he had given his son a human chance. He could take it or leave it as he liked. And when Kenyon, piecing together all that he had heard of Dr. Guthrie from Peter, from Graham and from Belle, added all that to the very obvious fact that these two boys were out in the world with blind eyes, he burst into a scoffing laugh. In his mind's eye he could see the excellent and distinguished Doctor rounding his back over experiments for the benefit of humanity, while he utterly neglected to give two of the human beings for whom he was responsible the few words of advice which

would render it unnecessary for them to become his patients.

If Kenyon had been a more generous man — if in his nature there had been one small grain of unselfishness — he would have gone at that very moment, then and there, to the door of the Doctor's laboratory — into that wonderful room — sat down opposite the man who spent his life in it with such noble concentration and begged him to desert his microbes and turn his attention to his sons. As it was he neglected to take an opportunity which would have enabled the recording angel to make one very good entry on the blank credit side of his account, and concentrated upon a way in which he could use Peter and Graham for his own material ends. He was immediately faced therefore with two "jobs," as he called them,— one to queer Peter's engagement with Betty, in order that he might achieve his friend's whole attention, the other to lift Graham out of his ghastly entanglement, for the same purpose. Bringing himself up to that point and relying upon his ingenuity with complete confidence, Kenyon mixed himself another high-ball and listened with a certain amount of eagerness for Belle's light step.

He hadn't long to wait. He had just gone into the dimly lighted hall with the intention of getting some air on the front doorstep, when the door opened and Belle let herself in.

"You keep nice hours," he said.

Belle had been dancing. Her cheeks were glowing and her eyes bright. She had never looked so all-

conqueringly youthful or so imbued with the joy of life. She came across to him like a young goddess of the forest, with the wild beauty and that suggestion of unrestraint which always made Kenyon's blood run quickly.

"Have you waited for me?" she asked. "How perfectly adorable of you."

"What have you been doing?"

"Oh, the usual things — dinner, theatre, dancing."

Kenyon went nearer and put his hands on her arms, hotly. "Curse those men!" he said.

"What men?"

"The men who've been holding you to-night. Why have I come over? Can't you scratch these engagements and wait for me? I'm not going to share you with every Tom, Dick and Harry in this place."

A feeling of triumph came to Belle — a new feeling — because hitherto this man's attitude had been that of master. "You're jealous!" she cried.

Kenyon turned away sharply. For once he was not playing with this girl for the sport of the thing, just to see what she would say and do in order to pass away the time. The whole evening had tended to upset his calculations and plans. He had found himself thrown suddenly into a position of responsibility,— a state that he avoided with rare and consummate agility. And now came Belle, radiant and high-spirited, from an evening spent with other men,— more beautiful and desirable than he had ever seen her look.

Belle turned him back. "You *are* jealous, you *are.*"

"Oh, good Lord, no," said Kenyon, with his most bored drawl. "Why should I be? After all it isn't for me to care what you do, is it? It's a large world and there's plenty of room for both of us — what?"

He walked away.

Triumph blazed in Belle's heart. She saw in Kenyon's eyes that he was saying the very opposite of the thoughts that were in his mind. She almost shouted with joy. She had longed to see into the heart of this man who was under such complete and aggravating self-control,— even to hurt him to obtain a big, spontaneous outburst of emotion from him. She loved him desperately, indiscreetly — far too well for her peace of mind — and she urgently needed some answering sparks of fire.

She didn't move. She stood with her cloak thrown back, her chin held high and the light falling on her dark hair and white flesh. This was her moment. She would seize it.

"Yes, there *is* plenty of room for us both," she said, "and the fact that I shall go on dancing with other men needn't inconvenience you in the least. I don't suppose that we shall even see each other in the crowd. There are many men who'll give their ears to dance with me,— I mean men who *can* dance, not bored Englishmen."

She drew blood. Kenyon went across to her quickly. "How dare you talk to me like that! Curse these men and their ears. Who's brought me

to this country? You know I came for you,— you know it. I *am* jealous — as jealous as the devil. And if ever you let another man put his arms round you I'll smash his face." He put out his hot hands to catch her.

But, with a little teasing laugh, Belle dodged and flitted into the library. The spirit of coquettishness was awake in her. *She* had the upper hand now and a small account to render for missed mails, and an appearance of being too sure. She threw off her cloak and stood with her back to the fireplace, looking like one of Romney's pictures of Lady Hamilton come to life.

Kenyon strode in after her, all stirred by her beauty. "In future," he said, "you dance with me. You understand?"

Belle raised her eyebrows and then bowed profoundly. "As you say, O my master!" And then she held out her arms with a sudden delicious abandon. "Take me, then. Let's dance all the way through life."

Kenyon caught her, and all about the room these two went, moving together in perfect unison, cheek to cheek, until almost breathless Belle broke into a little laugh, stopped singing, and said: "The band's tired." But Kenyon held her tighter and closer and kissed her lips again and again and again.

With a little touch of warning in its tone the clock on the mantel-piece presently struck two, and Belle freed herself and straightened her hair with a rather uncertain hand. "I must go now," she said breath-

lessly. "Father may be working late. Supposing he came through this room?"

"Serve him right," said Kenyon.

They went upstairs together on tip-toe, and halted for a moment on the threshold of Belle's bed-room. Through the half-open door Kenyon saw the glow of yellow light on the dressing-table, and the corner of a virginal bed. Once more he kissed her and then, breathing hard, went to his own room, stood in the darkness for a moment, and thanked his lucky star for the gift of Belle.

XIII

THE following afternoon, Peter, Kenyon and Belle went to see Ranken Townsend's pictures and to have tea with Betty. The little party was a great success. Peter and the artist got on splendidly together, which filled Betty with joy and gladness, and Kenyon had added to the general smoothness and pleasantness by offering extremely intelligent and enthusiastic criticism of the canvasses that were shown to him, drawing subtle comparisons between them and those of Reynolds and Gainsborough. Like all true artists, Townsend was a humble man and unsuspicious. He believed, in the manner of all good workers, that he had yet to find himself, although he had met with uncommon success. He was, therefore, much heartened and warmed by the remarks of one who, although young, evidently knew of what he was talking and proved himself to be something of a judge. When Kenyon

received a cordial invitation to come again to the studio he solidified the good impression that he had made by saying that he would be honoured and delighted.

There had been a sharp shower during tea, but the sky had cleared when they left Gramercy Park, taking Betty with them, and so they started out to walk home.

Belle and Betty went on in front, arm in arm, and the two friends followed. This suited Kenyon exactly. He had laid his plan and had something to say to Peter.

Belle was very happy, and she showed it. She looked round at Betty with her eyes dancing. "I can see that you're dying to ask me something," she said. "But don't. You and I don't have to ask each other questions. We've always told each other everything, and we always will."

"Belle, you're en-ga——"

"S-s-s-h! Don't mention the word."

"Why?"

"Well, we've been talking this afternoon and Nicholas says, and I think he's right — though I wish he weren't — that he doesn't want to go to father until he's been here longer and has made up his mind what he's going to do. You see, he's not well off. He's got to work,— although I can't fancy Nicholas working,— and so we're not going to be really engaged for a few months. Meantime, he's going to look round and find something to do. That'll be easy. You don't know how clever he is,— not merely clever

— a monkey can be clever, or a conjurer — the word I meant to use was 'able.' Aren't you glad? Isn't it splendid?"

"Oh, my dear," said Betty, "wouldn't it be perfectly wonderful if we could be married on the same day? Of course I've seen it coming ——"

Belle laughed. "I knew you'd say that. Personally I didn't see it coming. After we'd left Oxford I began to think that Nicholas had only been flirting with me. He wrote such curious, aloof little letters and very few of them. They might have been written by an epigramist to his maiden aunt; but last night, — well, last night made everything different, and this afternoon we've had a long talk. Of course I wish we were going to be openly and properly engaged, but I'm very happy and so I don't grumble."

"As the future Countess of Shropshire, I wonder whether you will ever give a little back room in your beautiful English place to the young American lawyer and his wife!"

"Betty, I swear to you that I don't care a dime about all that now,— I mean the title and the place. It's just Nicholas that I want — Nicholas, and no one else. I wouldn't care if he were what he calls a 'bounder' or a 'townee.' My dear, I'm mad about him — just mad."

"Isn't everything as right as Truth?" said Betty. "The more I see Peter the more I love him. He's,— well, he's a man, and he's mine. He's mine for another reason, and that's because he's always going to be a boy, and I'm here to look after him. He'll need

me. And I must have him need me, too, because I need to be needed. Do you understand?"

Belle nodded. "You're the born mother, my dear," she said, "whereas, I'm,— well, not. I want love — just love. I'll give everything I've got in the world for that — everything. Love and excitement and movement,— to go from place to place meeting new people, hearing new languages, seeing new types, living bigly and broadly, being consulted by a man who's brilliant and far-seeing,— *that's* what I need. That's *my* idea of life. Ah-h!" She shot out a deep breath and threw her chin up as though to challenge argument.

Betty watched her with admiration. She had never looked so unusual, so exhilarated, so fine. All about her there was the very essence of youth and courage and health. There was a glow in her white skin that was the mere reflection of the fire that was alight in her heart. Given happiness this girl would burst into the most fragrant blossoming and gleam among her sisters like a rose in a pansy bed. Given pain and disillusion she had it in her to fling rules, observances, caution, common sense and even self-respect to the four winds and go with all possible speed to the devil.

"What would have happened to us both if we hadn't gone to Oxford?" asked Betty, with an almost comical touch of gravity. "Think! I should be doomed to be a little old maid, with nothing but an even smaller dog to keep in order, and as for you ——"

"I? Don't let's talk about it. I should have gone top-pace through several years and then, with thirty looming ahead, married a nice safe man with oodles of money who would spend his life following me round. Thank Heaven, I shall never be the centre of that ghastly picture!"

And so they went on, these two young things, opening up their hearts to each other as they walked home and flying off at all manner of feminine tangents.

Kenyon, perfectly satisfied with his talk to Belle, whom he had secured without binding himself to anything definite, was wearing white spats, and so he picked his way across the wet streets like a cat on hot bricks. For several blocks he permitted Peter to talk about Betty. His affectation of interest and sympathy was not so well done as usual. He had determined, with a sort of professional jealousy, not to allow Ita Strabosck to trade on Graham's credulity any longer. All his thoughts were concentrated on his plan to smash up that burlesque arrangement, as he inwardly called it. If anyone were to make use of Graham he intended to be that one. The girl, at present a humble member of the great army of parasites in which he held a commission, must be cleared out. She was inconveniently in the way.

When Peter was obliged to stop for breath, Kenyon jumped in. "Look here!" he said. "You're coming with me to the shrine of the pernicious Papowsky to-night."

"You mean on Graham's business?" asked Peter. "Is it absolutely necessary to go to that place?"

"Absolutely. You'll see why, if everything works as I think it will, when we get there."

"Right. And how about Graham?"

"You and Graham are going to have dinner with me at Sherry's. I shall have to see that he has half a bottle too much champagne. That'll make him careless and put a bit of devil into him, and when I suggest that he shall take us to Papowsky's, he will jump at the notion. He's awful keen to show us what a blood he is. Once he gets us inside the rest will follow."

"I see. By Jove, I shall be thundering glad when Graham's plucked out of this wretched mess. The only thing is I'm booked to dine with Mr. Townsend at his club to-night."

"It can't be done," said Kenyon. "Directly you get home you must telephone. Say that an urgent matter has just cropped up and beg to be excused. Call it business — call it anything you like — but get out of it."

"All right!" said Peter. "I'm heart and soul with you, old boy. I'm very grateful for all the trouble you're taking. You always were a good chap."

"My dear Peter, add to my possession of the ordinary number of senses one that is almost as rare as the Dodo,— the sense of gratitude. Hello! Here's some of the family in the car!"

They had halted on the steps of the Doctor's house as Mrs. Guthrie and Ethel were driven up. Kenyon sprang forward, opened the door and handed the

ladies out with an air that Raleigh himself would have found commendable.

"Blood tells," said Belle, who watched from the top step, with a proud smile.

"Yes," said Betty, "but I prefer muscle. Look!"

The pavement was uneven in front of the house and the rain had made a little pool. So Peter picked his mother up, as though she were as light as a bunch of feathers, and carried her into the house.

"My dearest big boy!" she said.

"Darling little Mum!" said Peter.

XIV

KENYON, turned out as excellently as usual, led the way into the dining-room at Sherry's. It was a quarter to eight. Every other table was occupied. The large room was too warm and was filled with the conglomerate aromas of food. Peter sat on the right of his host and Graham on the left. Both men were quiet and distrait,— Peter because he was anxious, Graham for the reason that he had not been able to leave behind him the carking worries that now fell daily to his lot. Kenyon, on the contrary, was in his best form, and even a little excited. Apart from the fact that he rather liked having something to do that would prove his knowledge of life and the accuracy of his powers of psychology, he was looking forward to be amused with what went on in the studio-apartment of the Papowsky.

"By Jove!" he said, looking around and arrang-

ing his tie over the points of his collar with expert fingers,— a thing which Graham immediately proceeded to do also,—" this place has a quite distinct atmosphere. Don't you think so, Peter?"

"Has it?"

"One would, I see, choose it for a trying and dull-bright dinner with a prospective mother-in-law or with some dear thing, safely married, with whom one had once rashly imagined one's self to be in love. Waiter, the wine list!"

Graham laughed.

Kenyon, scoring his first point, continued airily. "For my part, I shall make a point of dining here one night with an alluring young thing fresh from the romantic quietude of a Convent School. I feel that these discreet lights and reserved colours will give a certain amount of weight and even solemnity to my careful flattery — A large bottle of Perrier Jouet '02, and be sparing with the ice. Peter, I think you'll find that this caviare gives many points to the tired stuff that used to be palmed off on us at Buol's and other undergraduate places of puerile riotousness."

The dinner, which Kenyon had ordered with becoming care, would have satisfied the epicureanism of a Russian aristocrat. During all its courses the host kept up a running fire of anecdote which quickly made the table a merry one. He also saw to it that Graham's glass was never empty. They sat laughing, smoking and drinking Crême Yvette until they were the last people in the room except for an old bloated man and a very young Hebrew girl. The band, which had

mixed ragtime indiscriminately with Italian opera and Austrian waltzes, and played them all equally well, went off to acquire the second wind and the relaxed muscles necessary for a later performance, and the waiters had long since rearranged the table for supper before Kenyon suggested adjourning to a club for a game of billiards which would amuse them until it was time to begin the business of the evening. So they walked round to the Harvard Club, and here Peter — the only one of the party who was completely his own master — became host.

They played until a little short of twelve o'clock. By this time, having been additionally primed up with one or two Scotch whiskeys, Graham was ready for anything, and it was then that Kenyon suggested that he should take them to the famous studio. Graham jumped at the idea, falling, as Kenyon knew that he would, into the little trap set for him. "We're children in your hands, Graham," he said, with a subtle touch of flattery. "Lead us into the vortex of art with the lid off. I'm most frightfully keen to see this place and it'll be great fun for you, duly protected, to find out whether the Papowsky has discovered whether you were the Knight Errant who rescued one of her victims. Romance, old boy — romance with a big R." And so Graham, more than a little unsteady and with uproarious laughter, led the way.

When they arrived at the studio-apartment in Fortieth Street they found the hall filled with people. It happened that Papowsky was giving an Egyptian night and nearly all of the habitués were in appro-

priate costumes. With the cunning of her species this woman knew very well that few things appeal so strongly to a certain type of men and women as dressing up,— which generally means undressing. The Japanese servant who took their hats and coats welcomed Graham with oily and deferential cordiality. "We are having a big night, sir," he said, with the peculiar sibilation of his kind and with his broad, flat hands clasped together. "It is Madame's birthday, sir. Yes, sir. You and the gentlemen will enjoy it very much."

Peter and Kenyon followed Graham into the studio. Their curiosity, already stirred by the sight of the men and women in the hall, was added to by the Rembrandt effect of the high, wide room, whose darkness was only touched here and there by curious faint lights. The buzz of voices everywhere and little bursts of laughter proved that there were many people present. As they went in, a powerful lime-light was suddenly focused on the centre of the room and into this slid a string of young, small-breasted, round-limbed girls. Led by one who contorted herself in what was supposedly the Egyptian manner, they moved to and fro with bent knees and angular gestures, and rigid profiles. Music came out of the darkness,— the music of a string band with cymbals.

"Good Lord!" said Kenyon. "What an amazing mixture of exotic stinks!"

"Look out for your money," said Peter, with a touch of blunt materialism.

Graham made for an unoccupied alcove, in which

there was a flabby divan. On this they all three sat down and began to peer about. A few yards away from them they presently made out an astonishing group of young men dressed as Egyptians. They were sitting in affectionate closeness, simpering and tittering together. On the other side they gradually discerned an overwhelmingly fat, elderly woman holding a kind of Court. She was almost enveloped in pearls. Otherwise she was scantily hidden. Her feet were in sandals. Several mere boys had arranged themselves in picturesque attitudes about her and half a dozen maidens were grouped round her chair. One was fanning her with a large yellow leaf. The blue light under which Graham had sat listening to the whispered appeal of Ita Strabosck fell softly and erotically upon them.

"Circe come to life," said Kenyon.

"Ugh! I don't quite know how I'm going to prevent myself from being sick," said Peter.

"Ah! but wait a bit," said Graham. "The show hasn't begun yet."

It made a fairly good beginning as he spoke. The girls in the circle of light brought their attitudinizing to an end and their places were instantly taken by two painted men in coloured loin-cloths. To a screaming outburst of wild and incoherent music they gave what seemed to Kenyon to be a perfect imitation of civet-cats at play. They crawled along on all-fours, sprang high into the air, crouched, bounded, whirled round each other and finally, amid a roar of applause, rolled out of view wrapped in each other's arms.

"Um!" said Kenyon. "After just such an exhibition as that Rome burst into flames."

There was insistent demand for an encore. The performance was repeated with the same gusto and relish. The three men saw nothing of it. Just as the band burst forth again, Kenyon made a long arm, caught the skimpy covering of a girl who was passing and drew her into the alcove.

"Come and cheer us up, Minutia," he said. "We feel like lost souls here."

The girl was willing enough. It was her business to cheer. She stood in front of them for a moment so that the blue light should show her charms. She looked very young and tiny. Fair hair was twisted round her head. She wore nothing but a thin, loose Egyptian smock, but her small snub nose and impudent mouth placed her, whatever might be her costume, on Broadway. "Say! Why are you muts dressed like men?" she asked with eager interest.

"Oh, well," said Kenyon, "we happen to *be* men; but I swear that we won't advertise the fact."

The girl greatly enjoyed the remark, but her scream of laughter was drowned by the band. Then she caught sight of Graham. "Oh, hello, Kid! So you've come back."

Graham made room for her. He rather liked being recognized. Kenyon would see that he knew his way about. "Yes, here I am again. It's difficult to get the Papowsky dope out of the system."

"Don't see why you should try. It's pretty good dope, I guess." She snuggled herself in between

Graham and Kenyon, putting an arm round each. She bent across Kenyon to examine Peter and gave an exaggeratedly dramatic cry of surprise and admiration. "My God! It's a giant! Say, dearie, you'd be the King of all the pussies, in a skin. All them dinky little love-birds would hop round your feet and chirp. Oh, gosh, you'd make some hit among the artists, sure!"

"Think so?" said Peter. He would have given a great deal for a pipe at that moment, so that he could puff out great clouds of smoke as a disinfectant.

"A gala night," said Graham.

"Sure. If the police were to make a raid to-night, — gee, there'd be a fine list of names in to-morrer's papers!"

"Think they will?" asked Kenyon. "By Jove! I wish they would. Think of seeing these people scuffling like frightened rabbits. It would be epoch-making."

The girl turned a keenly interested eye on Kenyon and looked him over with unabashable deliberation. "You've got a funny kind of accent," she said. "What is it? English?"

It was the first time that Kenyon had ever been accused of speaking with an accent. He was delighted. It appealed to his alert sense of humour. He laughed and nodded.

"The giant ain't English, is he? Are you, dearie?"

"No," said Peter.

"That's fine. I guess I don't like the English much. They always strike me as being like Americans, trying hard to be different."

"You don't dislike me, I hope? That would be a very bitter blow," said Kenyon, tweeking her ear.

"Oh, you're a comic," she said. "You're all right. Is this your first visit?"

"Yes. Have you been here long?" Kenyon asked the question carelessly, as though to keep the ball moving. It was, as a matter of fact, the beginning of his plan to disillusion Graham.

"Oh, I've been in the business ever since it started. Ask the kid, he knows. Don't you, kid?"

"Rather," said Graham.

"I used to be in the chorus, but this is ther life."

"I suppose so," said Kenyon. "Variety, gaiety, art,— what more can any girl desire?"

"Dollars," she said dryly. "And I make more here, by a long way."

"That's good. But,— but don't you get a little fed up? I mean it must be hopelessly monotonous to be shut up in one place all the time."

"Don't know whatcher mean. Translate that, won't you?"

"He means never getting out," said Graham.

"Never getting out! I don't get you, Steve. Me and my sister get away after the show, same as any other."

"What!" Graham was incredulous. It struck him that the girl was lying for reasons of loyalty to her employer. He knew better.

"Oh, I see!" said Kenyon, leading her on carefully. "You don't live here, then?"

"Live here? Of course I don't. I come about ten o'clock every night and leave anywhere between three and four in the morning. Earlier if there's nothing doing."

"Oh, I thought that the girls here are,— well, held up, kept here all the time,— prisoners, so to speak."

A shrill amused laugh rang out. "Oh, cut it out! What's all this dope? Say! you've been reading White Slave books. You're bug-house — dippy. Why, this is a respectable place, this is. This is the house of Art. We're models, that's what we are. We're only here for local colour. If we choose to make a bit extra on our own, we can." She laughed again. It was a good joke. The best that she had heard for years.

Kenyon threw a quick glance at Graham's face. He could just see it in the dim light. The boy was listening intently — incredulously. So also was Peter, who had drawn himself into a corner and was hunched up uncomfortably.

Kenyon began to feel excited. Everything was going almost unbelievably well. The girl was so frank, so open and obviously spontaneous. It was excellent. "Of course you tell us these things," he said, voicing what he knew was going silently through Graham's mind. "But we know better. We know that you, like that poor little girl, Ita Strabosck, are watched and not allowed to get away under any cir-

cumstances. Now, why not tell us the truth? We may be able to help you escape, too."

Again she laughed. "Oh, say!" she said. "What are you anyway? Reporters on the trail of a story? I'm telling you the truth. Why not? As for Ita,—Oh, ho! She put it all over a boob, she did. She's ambitious, she is. She was out to find a mut who'd keep her, that was her game. She told us so from the first. We used to watch her trying one after another of the soft ones. But they were wise, they were. But at last some little feller fell for her foreign accent and little sobs. She had a fine tale all ready. Oh, she's clever. She ought to be on the stage playing parts. Most of us go round to her place in the daytime and have a good time with some of her men friends. I've not been yet. But from what my sister says, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if she gets her man to marry her. From what she says, he's a sentimental Alick, and, O Gosh! won't she lead him some dance!"

At last Graham broke forth, his face white, his eyes blazing and his whole body shaking as though he had ague. "You're lying!" he shouted. "Every word you've said's a lie!"

The girl, entirely unoffended at this involuntary outburst, bent forward and looked at Graham with a new gleam of intelligence, amusement and curiosity. "My word, I believe you're Mr. Strabosck. I believe you're the boob. Oh, say! come into the light. I guess I must have a look at you."

Graham got up, stood swaying for a moment as

though he had received a blow between the eyes, and staggered across the room and out into the passage.

"Now he knows," said Kenyon. "Come on, Peter. We shall have our work cut to hold him in. There was blood in his eyes." Utterly ignoring the girl, Kenyon made for the door, forced his way through new arrivals and found Graham utterly sober, but with his mouth set dangerously, standing in front of the Japanese. "My hat and coat, quick!" he was saying, "or I'll break the place up."

"Steady, steady," said Kenyon. "We don't want a scene here."

"Scene be damned. I tell you something's got to break."

The Japanese ducked into the coat-room.

"Where's Peter?" Graham looked back expecting to see his brother's head and shoulders above the crowd. There was no sign of him.

By accident the lime-light which had been suddenly turned on for a new performance fell on Peter as he was marching towards the door of the studio. Instantly he found himself surrounded by half a dozen good-natured men who had all taken a little too much to drink. They, like the other people present, were in Egyptian clothes and obviously glad to see in Peter a healthy normal specimen of humanity.

"Oh, hello, brother, where are you off to?" asked one.

"Out!" said Peter shortly.

"I'll be darned if you are. Come and have a drink!"

"No, thanks, I've other things to do."

"Oh, rot! Be a sport and stay and help us to stir things up. Come on, now!"

Peter tried to push his way through. "Please get out of the way," he said.

But a jovial red-headed fellow got into it. "You're staying, if I have to make you."

Something snapped in Peter's brain. Before he could control himself he bent down and picked up the man by the scruff of his neck and the cloth that was wound round his middle and heaved him over the heads of the crowd into a divan, and then hitting out right and left cleared a path to the door, leaving chaos and bleeding noses behind him. Without waiting to get his hat and coat he made a dash for the elevator, caught it just as it was about to descend and went down to the main floor dishevelled and panting.

Out in the street he saw Kenyon trying to put Graham into a taxicab. Kenyon saw him and called out. "Come on, or Papowsky will make it hot for us."

On his way home from a late evening at one of his clubs, Ranken Townsend caught the name Papowsky, whose evil reputation had come to his ears. He threw a quick glance at the men who were leaving her place and saw that one of them was Peter. He drew up and stood in front of the man in whom he thought he had recognized cleanness and excellence and told himself that he was utterly mistaken.

"So this was your precious business engagement," he said, with icy contempt. "Well, I don't give my

daughter to a man who shares her with women like Papowsky, so you may consider yourself free. Good night."

And the smile that turned up the corners of Kenyon's mouth had in it the epitome of triumph. All along the line he had won. All along the line.

Peter watched the tall disappearing figure. He felt as though he had been kicked in the mouth.

PART THREE

LIFE

I

THAT night was one of the most extraordinary that Peter ever spent. Although he was smarting under the terrible injustice of Ranken Townsend's few, but very definite words, and felt like a man who had suddenly come up to an abyss, he took Graham in hand and devoted himself, with all the tenderness of a woman, to this poor boy.

All the way home in the cab Graham had been more or less held down by Kenyon and his brother. His brain was in a wild chaos. The realization that he had been tricked and made a fool of hit him hard. In his first great flush of anger he was filled with an overwhelming desire to go to the apartment in which he had placed Ita Strabosck and smash it up. He wanted to have the satisfaction of breaking and ripping apart every piece of furniture that he had bought to make her comfortable and happy, and make an absolute shambles of the place. He wanted also to order that girl out into the street. At that moment he no longer cared what happened to her or where she went. His vanity had received its first rude shock. All the way home he shouted at the top of his voice and struggled to get away from the men who were looking after him. It took all Peter's strength to hold him tight. It was by no means a good sight to see this young

man, who only half an hour before had been exhilarated by champagne and the feeling that he was really of some account as a man of the world, reduced to a condition of utter weariness by his violent outbursts. At first he absolutely refused to enter the house and insisted upon walking up and down the street. Finally, by making an appeal to his brother's affection, Peter persuaded him to go in quietly and up to his own room. There, pale and exhausted and entirely out of spirits, Graham turned quickly on his brother. "Keep Kenyon out," he said. "For God's sake, keep Kenyon out! I want *you*."

Kenyon heard these words and smiled to himself, nodded to Peter, and went downstairs again to make himself comfortable in the library and have a final cigarette before going to bed. He had every reason for self-congratulation. Graham was free,—there was no doubt about that,—and it looked as though Peter also would now be able to be made useful again. Luck certainly had been on his side that night.

It was not much after one o'clock when Peter shut the door of Graham's bed-room. From then onwards he turned himself into a sort of nurse, doing his best to concentrate all his thoughts on his brother's trouble and keep his own until such time as he could deal with it; and, while Graham poured out his heart — going over his story of the Ita Strabosck rescue again and again — Peter quietly undressed him, bit by bit. "Yes, old man," he kept saying, "I quite understand; but what you've got to do now is to get to bed and to sleep. Let me take off your coat.

That's right. Now sit down for a second. Now let me undo your shoes. It's a jolly good thing I came home. You bet your life I'll stand by you and see you through — you bet your life I will!"

"And you swear you'll not say anything about this to mother or Belle, and especially father — even if I'm ill,— in fact to any one? You swear it?"

"Of course," said Peter.

There was something comical as well as pathetic in the sight of this big fellow playing the woman to this distraught boy,— undoing his tie, taking off his collar and gradually getting him ready for bed. It was a long and difficult process and needed consummate tact, tender firmness and quiet determination. A hundred times Graham would spring to his feet and — with one shoe on and one shoe off, minus coat and waistcoat, tie and collar — pace the room from end to end, gesticulating wildly, sending out a torrent of words in a hoarse whisper — sometimes almost on the verge of tears. He was only twenty-four — not much more than a boy. It was very hard luck that he should be up against so sordid a slice of life at a time when he stood at the beginning of everything.

But Peter knew intuitively that it was absolutely necessary for Graham to rid his system of this Strabosck poison and empty out his heart and soul before he could be put to sleep, like a tired child. And so, with the utmost patience, he subjected himself to play the part of a mental as well as a physical nurse. Better than that, he mothered his brother, smoothed him down, sympathized with him, assured him again and

again that he had done the only possible thing; and finally as the first touch of dawn crept into the room had the infinite satisfaction of putting the clothes about his brother's shoulders and seeing his dark head buried in his pillow. Even then he was not wholly satisfied. Creeping upon tip-toe about the room he laid hands on Graham's razors and put them in his pocket. He was possessed with a sort of terror that the boy might wake up and, acting under a strong revulsion of feeling, cut his throat. It must be remembered that he had watched a human being under the strain and stress of a very strong and terrible emotion and he was naturally afraid. He knew his brother's excitable temperament. He had heard him confess that the girl had exercised over him something more than mere physical attraction, and although he was no psychologist it was easy for him to see that, for a time at any rate, Graham was just as ready to hurt himself as to hurt the girl. Some one had to be paid out for his suffering and it was Peter's business to see that his brother, at any rate, escaped punishment. Not content with having got Graham to bed and to sleep and secured the razors which might be used in a moment of impetuousness, Peter stayed on, sat down near the bed and listened to one after another of the sounds of the great city's awakening. It was then that he permitted himself to think back. He didn't remember the fracas in the studio apartment or the unpleasantness of the place with the unhealthy, unpleasant creatures who had been there. He repeated to himself over and over again the words — the cold,

cruel words of Ranken Townsend,—"So this was your precious business engagement. Well, I don't give my daughter to a man who shares her with women like Papowsky, so you may consider yourself free." In his mind's eye he could see the tall artist march away. He felt again as though he had been kicked in the mouth.

II

Ranken Townsend had arranged a sitting with Madame Mascheri, the famous opera singer, at eleven o'clock. He entered his studio at ten, and the first thing he did was to ring up one of his best friends and get into a quarrel with him. He had already so surprised his old servant at breakfast that she had retired to the kitchen in tears. He was angry and sore and there was likely to be a nice clash in the studio when he said sharp things to the spoiled lady who considered that all men were in their proper places only when they were at her feet.

Ranken Townsend was more than angry. He was disappointed — mentally sick — completely out of gear. He had seen Peter Guthrie — and there was no argument about the fact — come out of a notorious house, dishevelled and apparently drunk. It was a sad blow to him. A bad shock. The effects of it had kept him awake nearly all night. Betty was the apple of his eye. He was going to protect her at all costs, and he knew that in doing so he must bring great unhappi-

ness into her life. He had believed in Peter Guthrie. He had seemed to him to be a big, strong, clean, honest, simple, true fellow who had gone straight and who meant to continue to go straight. It meant a tremendous amount, an altogether incalculable amount to him as a father to have found that his estimate was wrong. He realized perfectly well that his words had been harsh the night before. He detested to have been obliged to say them; but, for the sake of his little girl, he was not going back on them. The evidence was too strong.

The telephone bell rang. He stalked across to it. "Well?" he said. "What's that? Who did you say? Send him up at once." And then, with his jaw set and his hands thrust deep into his pockets, he took up a stand in the middle of the studio and waited.

It was Peter. He came in quietly and looked very tired. "Good morning, Mr. Townsend," he said.

The answer was sharp and antagonistic. "I don't agree with you."

Peter put down his hat and stick, went up to the artist and stood in front of him squarely and without fear. "You're going to withdraw what you said last night."

"You think so?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because it was unjust and no man is hanged in these times before he's given a chance to defend himself."

"No one is going to hang you, Peter Guthrie. You've hanged yourself."

"No, no," said Peter, "that won't do. It isn't like you to adopt this attitude and I must ask you to treat me properly."

Townsend shot out a short laugh. "There's no need for you to ask me to do that. My treatment of you is going to be so proper that this is going to be the last time you'll come into this studio. I've done with you. So far as I'm concerned you're over. Betty isn't going to see you or hear from you again. I consider that it was a mighty good accident that took me into Fortieth Street last night. That's all I have to say."

Peter didn't budge. He just squared his shoulders and tilted his chin a little more. "I don't think that's all you've got to say," he said. "I quite understand that you had a bad shock when you saw me coming out of that place last night. If I were in your shoes I should say just what you're saying now."

"It's something to win your approval," said Townsend, sarcastically, "and I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you for coming down town to give me your praise."

"Oh, don't talk like that," said Peter. "It doesn't do any good and it doesn't help to clear things up."

"You can't clear things up. Neither of us can. You began by lying to me when you said you had a business engagement, and you wound up by coming out drunk of the rottenest house in this city. And, see here! I don't like your tone. I'm not standing

here to be reproved by you for my attitude in this matter. I might be more inclined to give you a chance if you made a clean breast of it."

"I wish I could," said Peter, "but I can't. All I can tell you is that I had to go to that place last night for a very good reason. I'd never been there before and I shall never go there again. I hadn't even heard of the place until a few days ago. You've got to accept my word of honour that I went there with a friend of mine to get a man who means a very great deal to me out of bad trouble."

"It's taken you sometime to think that out," said Townsend, brutally.

Peter winced as if he had been struck. He had gone to the studio under the belief that everything would be quite easy. He was honest. His conscience was clear. He was not a liar. Surely his word would be accepted. Whatever happened he wasn't going to be disloyal to his brother. Apart from the fact that he had sworn not to give Graham away, he wasn't the kind that blabbed. He tried again, still keeping himself well under control, although he was unable to hide the fact that Ranken Townsend's utter disbelief in him hurt deeply.

"Mr. Townsend," he said, "I don't want to do anything to make you more angry than you are. It's perfectly simple for you to say that you won't have me marry Betty. But remember this: I've only got to go to Betty and ask her to marry me, with or without your consent, and she will. If you don't believe me, you don't know Betty."

"Ah! but that's exactly where you make your mistake," said Townsend. "I *do* know Betty. And let me tell you this, Peter Guthrie: My girl has been brought up. She hasn't been dragged up or allowed to bring herself up. The consequence is that she's not among the army of present-day girls who look upon their fathers and mothers as any old trash to be swept aside and over-ridden whenever it suits them to do so. I'm the man to whom she owes all the happiness and comfort that she's known. I'm the man who's proud to be responsible for her, to whom she belongs and who knows a wide stretch more of life and its troubles than she does,—and, not being an empty-headed, individualistic, precocious little fool, she knows it too. She belongs to a past decade — to an old-fashioned family. Therefore, what I say goes; and if I tell her that, for a very good reason, I don't want her to have anything to do with you, she will be desperately unhappy, but she'll not question my authority or my right to say so. These are facts, however absurd and strange they may appear to you. I think it would be a damned good thing if other fathers took the trouble to get on the same footing with their daughters. There'd be less unhappiness and fewer grave mistakes if they did." He was almost on the verge of adding, "Look at your sister Belle if you don't believe me."

Peter had nothing to say.

The two men stood facing one another, gravely, in silence. They were both moved and stirred. And then Peter nodded. "I'm glad you're Betty's father,"

he said at last. "She owes you more than she can ever pay back. I give you my word that I shan't attempt to dispute your authority. I respect you, Mr. Townsend, and when I marry Betty I want to have your consent and approval. I also give you my word that it was absolutely necessary for me to go to Papowsky's last night, without any explanation whatever. Are you going to take it?"

"No," said Townsend; "I'm not. Even if I'd known you for years what you ask is too much for me to swallow. Good Lord, man! can't you see that I'm protecting my daughter — the one person I love in this world — the one person whose happiness means more to me than anything on earth? Why should I believe that you're different from other young men,— the average young man whom I see every day, who no more cares about going clean to the woman he is going to marry than he does for running straight afterwards? I don't know you and hitherto I've accepted you on your face value. When it comes to the question of a man's trusting his daughter to the first person who comes and asks him for her, he's got to be pretty sure of what he's doing. In any case, I don't hold with the old saying that 'young men will be young men.' You may sow your wild oats if you like, but they're not going to blossom in the garden of a little girl who belongs to me. In that respect I'm as narrow-minded as a Quaker. And let me tell you this finally: I know the sort of place that Papowsky's is. I know what goes on there and the sort of people who frequent it. To my mind any man who's seen coming

out of it does for himself as the future husband of any good girl. If you have, as you say, a good reason for going there, tell it to me. If not, get out."

The artist had said these things with intense feeling. Hard as they were, Peter had to acknowledge that they were right. Just for one instant he wavered. He was on the point of giving the whole story away. Then his loyalty to his brother came back to him. He would rather be shot than go back on the man who had trusted him and with whom he had grown up with such deep affection. "Very well," he said, "that settles it. I've nothing more to say. But one of these days I'll prove that my word of honor was worth taking. In the meantime, you can't stop me from loving Betty and you'll never be able to stop Betty from loving me."

He turned on his heel, took up his hat and stick and went out.

III

Graham was sitting up in bed when Peter returned to his room. He was looking about him with an expression of queer surprise,— puzzled apparently to find himself in his room.

"Oh, hello, old man!" said Peter. "How d'you feel?"

Graham put his hand up to his head. "I don't know yet. Have I been asleep? I thought I'd been in a railway accident. I was looking about for the broken girders and the ghastly signs of a smash."

He got slowly out of bed, put on his slippers and walked up and down for a few minutes with a heavy frown on his face. The emotion of the night before had left its marks. He stopped in front of a chair on the back of which his evening clothes were hanging neatly. He remembered that he had thrown them off. He noticed — at first with irritation — that the things on his dressing-table had been re-arranged — tampered with. It didn't look as he liked it to look. Something had been taken away. It dawned on him that all his razors had been removed. "Removed," — the word sent a sort of electric shock through his brain as it passed through. He went over to the window and looked out into the street. The sun glorified everything with its wonderful touch. Good God! To think that he might be standing at that very moment on the other side of the great veil.

"I don't know — I don't know what to say to you for all this, Peter," he said.

Peter sat down, thrust his hands into his pockets and his long legs out in front of him. Reaction had set in. He felt depressed and wretched. "One of these days," he said, "I may ask you to do the same thing for me."

Something in his tone made Graham turn round sharply. "What's wrong?"

"Everything's wrong," said Peter. "But I'll tell you some other time. Your affair has got to be settled first."

"No; tell me now," said Graham. He dreaded to feel that he was the cause somehow or other of bring-

ing trouble upon his brother. Never before in all his life had he seen Peter looking like that.

"Mr. Townsend happened to be passing Papowsky's last night and saw me coming out. I'd had a scrap up in the studio with a bunch of men who were half drunk. I must have looked like it. He told me that he wouldn't have me marry Betty, and he repeated it this morning. I've just come away from his place. That's what's the matter with me."

"Oh, curse me!" cried Graham. "Curse me for a fool!"

Peter sprang to his feet. "Don't start worrying about me. And look here; don't let's waste time in trying to scrape up spilt milk. I'm going to marry Betty, that's a dead certainty, and sooner or later Mr. Townsend will withdraw the brutal things he said to me. And you're going to wipe your slate clean, right away. So buck up and get busy, old man. Have your bath and get dressed as soon as you can. I'm going to help you to fix your affair as soon as you're ready."

"How?" asked Graham.

"I don't know quite. I think I'll ask Kenyon."

"No, don't. Let's do it together. I don't want Kenyon to see,— I mean I'd rather Kenyon was out of it. I'd rather that you were the only one to look on at the remainder of my humiliation,— that's the word. He knows quite enough as it is."

"All right!" said Peter. "Hurry up, then. We'll go round to the apartment and see Ita Strabosck. I cashed a cheque on the way back from Mr.

Townsend's. We can't let her go out into the street with nothing in her pocket,— that's impossible."

Graham nodded. He couldn't find words to say what he felt about it all. There was a look of acute pain on his pale face as he went into the bath-room.

And then Peter sat down at his brother's table and wrote a little note to Betty:

"My own dearest Baby:

"Something has happened and your father — who's a fine fellow and well worthy of you — believes that I'm such a rotter that he's told me to consider myself scratched. I'm going to play the game by him for your sake as well as his. Don't worry about it. Leave everything to me. I won't ask you to go on loving me and believing in me, because that you must do, just as I shall go on loving you and believing in you. *It has to be.* I've got to think things over to see what can be done.

"In the meantime, and as long as I live,

"Your PETER."

He addressed the letter and put the envelope in his pocket. Then he went to the bath-room and called out: "Old man, shall I have some breakfast sent up for you?" The answer was, "No; the sight of food would make me sick."

Graham dressed quickly and nothing more was said by either of the brothers until they went out into the street together.

"We'll get a cab," said Peter.

"No; I'm too broke. Let's walk."

And so they walked hard, arm in arm. It seemed rather an insult to Graham that the day was so fine,

the sky so blue and equable and that all the passers-by seemed to be going on their way untroubled. He'd have been better pleased if the day had been dark and ugly and if everybody had been hurrying through rain and sleet. His own mind was disturbed by a storm of the most unpleasant thoughts. The girl whom they were on their way to see had exercised a strong physical fascination over him. He had believed in her absolutely. She had meant a great deal to him. Her deceit and cunning selfishness brought pessimism into his soul. It was a bad feeling.

As they came up to the house with its shabby door, a man well-past middle age,— a flabby, vulgar person, with thick awkward legs,— left it rather quickly and walked in the opposite direction. The two boys went in and Peter led the way up the dark staircase. The door was open and Lily, the colored maid, was holding a shrill argument with a man with a basket full of empty siphons on his arm. Her face broke into an odd and knowing smile when she saw Graham. They passed her without a word and went along the passage into the sitting-room. It was empty, but in a hideous state of disorder. There was about it all that last night look which is so unpleasant and insalubrious. The windows had not been opened and the room reeked with stale tobacco smoke and beer. Cigar stumps lay like dead snails on the carpet. Empty bottles were everywhere and dirty glasses. Through the half-open door which led into the bed-room they heard a flutey, uncertain soprano voice singing a curious foreign song.

After a moment of weakness and indecision, Graham pulled himself together and called out: "Ita! Ita!" sharply.

The song ceased abruptly. There was a cry of well-simulated joy and the girl, with her hair frowzled and a thin dressing-gown over her night-dress, ran into the room with naked feet. She drew up short when she saw the expression on Graham's face and Peter's square shoulders behind him. "Somesing ees ze matter," she said. "Oh, tell me!" Second nature and constant practice made the girl begin to act. This was obviously an opportunity for being dramatic.

With a huge effort Graham controlled himself. "I'm giving up this apartment to-day," he said.

"You are giving up ——?"

"I said so."

"And what ees to become of me? You take me somewhere else?"

"No. I hope I shall never see you again — never!"

The girl burst forth. How well he knew that piteous gesture — that pleading voice — the tears that came into those large almond eyes,— all those tricks which had made him what he had been called the night before at Papowsky's —"a boob." "What 'ave I done? Do you not love me any more? I love you. I will die for you. You are everysing to me. Do not leave me to ze mercy of ze world. Graham! Graham! My saviour! I love you zo!"

Graham shook her off. "Please don't," he said. "Just pack your things and dress yourself. All I've

got to say to you is that I've found you out. Perhaps you'd better go back to Papowsky's. You're very clever,— they all say so there. Find another damned young fool — that'll be easy."

The girl suddenly threw back her head and broke into an amazing laugh. The sound of it,— so merry — so full of a sort of elfin amusement,— was as startling to the two boys as though a bomb had been dropped into the room. "I could not find such a damned fool as you," she said loudly and coarsely, "eef I 'unted the earth. Eef you 'ad waited to come until to-night you would 'ave found zis little nest empty and ze bird flown. There ees a better boob zan you. Perhaps you met 'im going out. 'E marries me to-morrow. I vas to keep zat for a leetle surprise. Oh, yes, I am clever, and eet kills me with laughing to zee you stand there like a school teacher. You turn over a new leaf now, eh? Zat ees good. Zo do I. To-morrow I am a wife. I marry a man. My time with babies ees over."

She picked up a glass that was half-full of beer and with a gesture of supreme contempt jerked it into Graham's face. Then, with the quickness of an eel, she returned to her bedroom and slammed the door. They heard her laughing uncontrollably.

Graham wiped his face with his handkerchief, and dropped it on the floor with a shiver. "I shan't want to borrow any money from you, Peter," he said in a low voice. "Let's go."

And they went out into the street together — into the sun, and took a long breath of relief — a long,

clean breath, untainted by stale tobacco smoke and beer and the pungent scent of Ita Strabosck.

Peter made no attempt to put into words his intense sympathy, but he took his brother's arm and held it tight, and Graham was very grateful. Right out of the very bottom of his heart two tears welled up into his eyes as he walked away.

After all, he was only twenty-four.

IV

On her way up to her room that night, Ethel drew up short outside Graham's bedroom door. She knew that he was in, which was in itself unusual. She thought there must be something the matter, because she had seen Graham leave the house in the morning long after his usual time. She had also watched his face at dinner and had seen in it something that frightened her. It was true that Peter was her favorite brother, but she was very fond of and had great admiration for Graham. Also she, herself, was in trouble. Trouble seemed to be an epidemic in that family. Her Knight Errant next door, in spite of her signalling and the fact that she had laid out as usual the cigarettes and the candies, had deserted her. In order to receive his visits and feed herself on the excitement with which they provided her, she was still maintaining her pretence of invalidism, and the worst of it was she now knew that she had grown to be very fond of the boy, who at first had only been a source of amusement.

So, with a fellow-feeling for Graham, she listened outside his door. She wanted very badly to slip in and give her sympathy to her brother and receive some of it from him. She didn't feel quite as individualistic as usual. The artificiality of the flapper left her for the time being and she felt as young as she really was and rather helpless, and awfully lonely.

Hearing nothing, she tapped gently on the door, opened it and went in. Graham was sitting in an armchair with his elbows on his knees and his head between his hands. He made a picture of wretchedness which would have melted the heart of a sphinx. Ethel went over to him and put her hand on his shoulder. "Is anything the matter, Hammie?" she asked, using the nickname that she had given him as a child.

Graham didn't look up. "Oh, Lord, no!" he said, with a touch of impatience. "What should be the matter?" But he was very glad to feel that touch of friendliness on his shoulders.

"Can I do anything for you?"

"Oh, no. I'm all right — as right as rain."

Ethel knew better. She knew also that she would have said those very things to Belle if she had been caught in a similar state of depression. So she sat down on the arm of Graham's chair and put her hand against his cheek. "I've got about a hundred and seventy-five dollars, if that's any good to you," she said.

Graham gave a scoffing laugh, but all the same he was very grateful for the offer. "My dear kid," he

said, "a hundred and seventy-five dollars — that's no better than a dry bone to a hungry man."

"Is it as bad as all that, Hammie?"

"Yes, and then some."

Ethel thought deeply for a few minutes. Her characteristic selfishness, which had been almost tenderly encouraged at school, had given way temporarily before her own disappointment. "Well," she said finally, "I've got four brooches and five rings, a watch and a dressing-case. You can sell them all if you like."

Then Graham turned round, gave his little sister one short, affectionate look and put his head down on her shoulder. "Don't say anything, please," he said. "Just let me stay here for a minute. It does me good."

And he stayed there for many minutes, and the two sat silently and quietly, getting from each other in their mutual trouble the necessary help which both needed so much. A strange, new feeling of motherliness stole over the girl. It surprised her. It was almost like being in church on Christmas Eve, or listening to the most beautiful melody.

It was a long time since these two had taken the trouble to meet each other half-way. The thoughts of both went back to those good hours when Graham had put his little sister on a sled in front of him and pushed her, laughing merrily, over the hard snow in the park. He had never even dreamed in those days of money and the fever that it brings, or women and the pain they make.

And then Graham got up, just a little ashamed of himself,— after all, he was now a man of the world,— and saw that Ethel's cheeks were wet with tears. It was his turn to try and help. "Good Lord!" he said. "You don't mean to say that you're worried about anything. What is it?"

She shook her head and turned her face away. "Oh, nothing — nothing at all."

All the same she felt much, ever so much better for the kiss that he gave her, and went along to her own room half-determined to be honest with herself and go back to school the next day. She was rather startled to find the smell of cigarette smoke in her bedroom, which was in darkness. She turned up the nearest light and almost gave a cry of joy when she found the boy from next door sitting on the window-sill.

"Jack!" she cried. "I thought you were — I thought you had ——"

Jack threw his cigarette out of the window and got up awkwardly. "I got your note just now," he said, "and so I've come."

Ethel went to the door and locked it. All the clouds had rolled away. She was very happy. She had evidently made a mistake. He must have been prevented from coming. She wished he'd given her time to powder her nose and arrange the curls about her ears. As it was, she opened the box of cigarettes and held out the candies to him.

"No, thanks," said Jack. "I'm off chocolates and I've knocked off smoking to a great extent."

With a womanly touch which she and all women have inherited from Eve, who never forgot to stand with her back to the sun and took care, if possible, to remain in the woods until after breakfast, Ethel turned on a shaded light and switched off the strong overhead glare which made her look every day of her fifteen years. Then she sat down with the light over her left shoulder. She was quite herself again. All was well with the world.

"Where have you been?" she asked, a little imperiously.

"Nowhere," said Jack.

"Then why haven't you been to see me? I have signalled every night. I can't understand it."

"I know you can't. That's why I've stayed away."

Ethel was puzzled at the boy's solemn tone. "Of course, if you don't want to come, please don't. I wouldn't drag you here against your will for anything."

"Yes, but I *do* want to come. I stay away for your sake, and I'm not coming again after this evening."

That was exactly what Ethel wanted to hear. She'd been afraid that Jack had found some one else. Now she knew differently. "Don't be silly," she said. "Have a cigarette. Come and sit on the sofa and don't let's waste time."

But Jack didn't move. He had gone back to the windowsill and remained hunched up on the narrow ledge, holding on with both hands. "I'm off in a minute," he said. "I'm just going to tell you one or

two things before I go. Would you like to hear them?"

"If they're pleasant," she said.

"Well, they're not pleasant."

"Well, then, tell me."

For a moment or two Jack remained silent. Perhaps he was trying to find careful words into which to put his thoughts. When finally he spoke it was with a suppressed emotion that sent a quiver through the quiet room. "I can't stand coming here," he said. "I can't stand it. I don't know what you are — whether you're a mere baby who knows nothing, or an absolute little rotter. You tell me I can say what I think, so I'm going to." He got up and went a little nearer to the sofa. "What d'you think I'm made of? Look at yourself in the glass and then see whether you're the sort of a girl who can let a man into her bedroom night after night for nothing. I tell you I can't stand it. I stayed away, not because I wanted to, but because I didn't want to do you any harm. I was a fool for coming here at all. If I didn't believe that you are simply a silly girl I'd stay to-night and come every night as I used to do, but I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt. Next time you signal to a man take care to find out what he's made of and be a bit more careful. There, now you've got it. Good night and good-bye. I've a darned good mind to put the note you sent me to-night in an envelope and address it to your mother. It would save some other fellow from a good deal of unnecessary discomfort. I'm frightfully sorry to be

so brutal, but I don't believe you know what you're doing. Perhaps this'll be a lesson to you."

He turned quickly, swung himself out, went up the rope ladder hand over hand and drew it up after him.

Ethel closed her eyes and sat rigid. The boy might have planted his fist in her face.

V

Kenyon had taken Mrs. Guthrie and Belle to the Thirty-ninth Street Theatre that night. A quiet little romantic play, quite unpretentiously written, had found its way to that theatre either by accident or as a stop-gap. The manager who put it there had arranged, even before the opening performance, to replace it at the end of the week with something which had a punch,— a coarse, vulgar, artificial piece of mechanism such as he had been in the habit of producing all of his managerial life. His intention to do this was strengthened by the press notices, which all agreed that the new piece was a very little play about nothing in particular and which made too great a demand upon the imagination of its audience. That last remark of the critics was worth a million dollars to the play's author. The theatre remained almost empty until the Friday night of its first — and if the manager had anything to do with it — only week. The scenery for the new production was already stacked on the stage. But to the amazement of all concerned, except the author, the theatre did business. The house

was almost full and the box office was so busy that the young man who looked after it,— a past-master in rudeness,— became quite querulous. On Saturday night there was a full house and the booking was so big for the following week that the notices of withdrawal were taken down and the play with a punch had to find another home. The manager, greatly put out, watched this little play sail into a big, steady success, and whenever his numerous acquaintances — he had no friends — caught him in an unbusy moment, he would say: "I can't make it out. It beats me. Look at the notices. I couldn't understand a word of the thing when I read it. I only put it into the theatre to keep it warm. My word, I don't know what the public wants." He didn't, and he never would. But the author knew. He had made a play which appealed to the imagination of his audience.

Peter had watched the party go to the theatre after an early dinner; had seen Graham go up to his room and his father drive away to a meeting at the Academy of Medicine; and then, anxious to be alone and think things over, he too left the house for a long, hard tramp. He went into the park and walked round and round the reservoir. The night was fine and clear, and up in the sky, which was pitted with stars, a young moon lay on her back. From all sides the music of traffic came to his ears in a never-ceasing refrain, and high up he could see the numerous electric signs which came and went with steady precision and monotony. Every now and then he caught sight of the Plaza, whose windows all seemed to be alight. It gave a

peculiar touch of fantasy to that side of the Park.

Peter found himself thinking of some of the things which Ranken Townsend had said to him. Without bitterness, and certainly without anger, he began to see something in the artist's bluntness which gradually made him long, with a sort of boyish anguish, to go in to his own father. The more he thought about this the more it seemed to him right and necessary and urgent to beard the Doctor in his den and break down the curious barrier which shyness had erected between him and his children. He realized at that moment that he stood desperately in need of a father's help and advice. It was quite obvious to him also that Graham needed these things even more than he did. If only they could both go to that wise and good man who stood aloof and get something more from him than the mere money with which he was so generous. He knew — no one better — that he always received from his mother the most tender sympathy, but how could he discuss with her some of the things with which he was faced since the Ita Strabosck episode had come into his life? Kenyon had done much to make it plain to him that it was not good to continue to walk in blank ignorance of the vital facts with which his father dealt daily. He was a man and he had to live in the world. His boyish days among boys were over. They belonged to the past.

It was borne in upon him as he went round and round the wide stretch of placid water in which was reflected the moon and stars, that his father should

know all about Graham. Certain things that Kenyon had said stuck to his mind like burrs. If he could persuade Graham to make a clean breast of it to the Doctor, the brother who meant so much to him might be saved from a disaster which would not merely affect himself, but others,— a wife and children perhaps. Kenyon had hinted at this and the hint was growing in Peter's mind like an abscess. It was time that he and his brother faced facts and knew them. Who could initiate them better than the distinguished doctor whose life had been devoted to such serious questions?

Having brought himself up to this point and being also tremendously anxious to tell his father of the position in which he stood with Mr. Townsend, Peter determined to strike while the iron was hot — to go home and see his father at once. He left the park quickly, and when finally he let himself into the house was astonished to see how late it was. The servant told him that his mother and sister had come back from the theatre and had gone to bed. "Mr. Kenyon," he added, "came back, but went out again at once. Mr. Graham went to bed early and the Doctor has not returned yet."

"Good!" thought Peter. "Then I'll wait for him." He gave up his hat and stick, went through the quiet, dimly lit library, and after a moment's hesitation opened the door of the Blue Room,— that room in which he had been so seldom, hitherto only under protest. He had opened the door quietly and was astonished to see Graham sitting at his father's desk

with the light from a reading lamp shining on his dark head. "By Jove, Graham!" he said. "You must have been thinking my thoughts. This is extraordinary."

Graham looked up with a start and thrust something under the blotting-pad. His face went as white as a sheet and he stammered a few incoherent words.

Quite unconscious of his brother's curious embarrassment, Peter sat on the corner of the desk. "I've had it out with myself to-night," he said, going, as he always did, straight to the point. "I've made up my mind to make father into a father from now onwards. I can't stand this detached business any longer. Let's both wait for him and have it out."

"What d'you mean?" asked Graham. "I don't get you." He put his hand out surreptitiously and scrunched up one of the sheets of note paper on which he had been writing.

"Listen!" said Peter, with intense earnestness. "I've got to know things. So have you. I've got to have advice. I've got to be treated as a human being. What's the good of our having a father at all if we don't get something from him? I don't mean money and a roof, clothes and things to eat. I mean help. I'm in a hole about Betty. I want to talk about my work — about my future. Graham, let's give father a chance. Many times he seems to me to have fumbled and been on the point of asking us to meet him half-way. Well, I'm going to do so. Stay here and let's both see it through. Have the pluck to tell him about your trouble and throw the whole

responsibility on him. It's his and he ought to have it. Wait a second. Listen! If Ranken Townsend had been your father you never would have gone near Papowsky. You wouldn't have come within a thousand miles of Ita Strabosck — that's a certainty."

Graham got up quickly, but kept his hand heavily on the blotting-pad. "No," he said almost hysterically. "Count me out. I'm not in this. It's no good our trying to alter father at this time of day — it's too late. He's microbe mad. He knows nothing whatever about sons and daughters. I could no more tell him about the mess I'm in than fly over the moon. He'd turn and curse me — that's all he'd do. He'd get up and preach, or something. He doesn't understand anything about life. I'd a jolly sight rather go to mother, only I know it would hurt her so, and anyway my story isn't fit for her ears. No; cut me out, I tell you. I'm not in this."

Peter got up and put his hands strongly on his brother's shoulders. He didn't notice then how near he was to a breakdown. "Graham, old man, you've *got* to be — you've just *got* to be. What Kenyon said is true. You and I are blind and are damned children wandering about — stumbling about. We need — we absolutely need a father more than ever we did in our lives. So do Belle and Ethel. We all think that we can go alone, and we can't. I know I'm right — I just know it — so you've got to stay."

A puff of wind came through the open window. Several pieces of paper fluttered off the desk and fell softly on the floor. Peter stooped and picked them

up. On them the words "Hunter G. Guthrie" had been written over and over again.

He laughed as he looked at them. "What on earth has father been writing his name all over these sheets for? How funny! What a strange old chap he seems to be. It's a sort of undergraduate trick, this,—practising a signature before writing a first cheque."

"Give 'em to me!" said Graham sharply, and he tried to snatch them away. His voice was hoarse and his hand shook.

Peter looked at him in great surprise. It was impossible for him not to be aware of the fact that something was dreadfully wrong. As he stood and looked into his brother's guilty face the fact which stood out most clearly was that Graham had himself been writing his father's signature all over those sheets of paper. Why? A man did a thing of that sort for one reason only.

He seized Graham's hand which was pressed on the blotting-pad, jerked it up, pushed the blotting-pad aside and picked up the cheque-book that laid beneath it.

"Don't touch that," cried Graham, "for God's sake! Let me have it! I'll tear out the cheque. I think I was mad. Oh, God! I'm so worried I didn't know what I was doing!"

There was a struggle, quick and sharp, and in an instant Graham found himself staggering across the room backwards.

With his heart standing still, Peter opened the thin, narrow, brown-covered book. A cheque for three

thousand dollars had been made out to Graham Guthrie. The signature had been forged.

"You've done this," he said. "You've actually ——"

Graham was up on his feet. His lips were trembling. He put out a shaking hand. "My God!" he whispered. "Father's in the library."

The sound of the Doctor's thin, clear voice came through the half-open door. Frozen with fear, Graham seemed to be unable to move. His very lips had lost their colour.

With an overwhelming anxiety to hide his brother's frightful fall from honesty and sanity, Peter pounced on the little book, thrust it into Graham's pocket, snatched up the give-away slips of paper, tore them into small pieces and threw them in the basket.

"Don't give me away. Don't let him know. If you do, I swear to God you'll never see me again!"

There was still something to be done, and Peter did it. He took his brother up in his arms, realizing that he was, in a way, paralyzed, carried him to a chair that was out of the ring of light and sat him down. "Get yourself in hand, quick," he whispered. "Quick, now!"

And Graham, strengthened by his brother's vitality, forced himself into some sort of control.

Striding to the fireplace, Peter stood there waiting for his father, with a strange pain going through his body. He felt just as though he had been told that Graham, his best pal and dear brother, had had an appalling accident and might not live.

The Doctor's voice, as he gave directions to a servant, came nearer and nearer.

VI

With his hand on the handle of the door, the Doctor paused. "I want you to call me to-morrow at half-past-seven, Alfred. Don't forget. I have a busy day. Good-night."

The two boys watched him come into the room. His head was high and there was a little smile round his usually straight mouth. He walked with a sort of sprightliness, as though moving to music. He looked extraordinarily young and exhilarated.

He saw what was to him a most unusual sight in that quiet, lonely work-room. He was surprised into an exclamation of great pleasure, and he quickened his pace until he stood between his sons. Graham got up and put on a nervous, polite smile. "This's what I most wanted," said the Doctor,—"my two boys waiting for me here in this room. I can't tell you — I can't tell you, Peter, and Graham, how often, how strongly, how eagerly I've wished to see you where you are now. I can't tell you how I've longed to have you here after my meetings, to tell you how I'm getting on, moving things forward, and to ask you share in my successes. My dear Peter — my dear Graham."

It was pitiful. The strange, almost incoherent outbreak of the shy man nearly made Peter burst into

tears. He would almost rather his father had treated them coldly and with raised eyebrows. His present attitude — his unhidden joy — his eager, and even wistful welcome, had in it something of tragedy, because it showed all the waste of years during which the sympathy and the complete, necessary and beautiful understanding of these three might have been welded into one great, insurmountable rock.

The Doctor, with an obvious desire to play host,— an intuition which again touched Peter deeply,— went quickly to a little chest which stood in a corner of the room. "What will you have?" he asked anxiously. "I've got a very good cigar here, or cigarettes if you would like them better. Let me see! What do you smoke, Peter?"

"He doesn't even know what I smoke," thought Peter. "A pipe," he said.

"Oh, yes, yes! Well, this is generally said to be a very good mixture. Try some." He gave a jar of tobacco to Peter. "These are nice, though perhaps they are a little too dry." And he extended a box of cigars to Graham.

The boy helped himself, trying to keep his hand steady. "Thank you," he said.

"And now," said the Doctor, "let's sit down and have a long yarn. Shall we? I would like to tell you about to-night. The meeting was of vital interest and importance." He drew his chair forward so that it might be between those of the two boys. He looked from Peter's face to Graham's as though afraid that he was asking too great a favour. "You — you'll

forgive my talking about myself, I'm sure — at least I hope you will. I so seldom have the opportunity,— with those I love, I mean — with those for whom I'm working. To see you here like this, at last, makes me very happy." He slipped his large glasses off and wiped them openly without attempting to hide the fact that they had become suddenly useless to him.

A short silence followed — a silence in which the emotion with which the room was charged could almost be heard. Peter threw a quick glance round it, almost as though he expected to see the curious experimental tubes turn and point accusingly at his brother. The laboratory was filled with such tubes and other curious instruments,— all of them silent witnesses of Graham's act of madness.

The Doctor re-lit his cigar, put his glasses on again and clasped his long, capable hands over one thin knee. "I wish I could even suggest to you," he said — more naturally and with keen enthusiasm —" the intense excitement that we bacteriologists are all beginning to feel. For years and years we've been experimenting, and little by little our work is coming to a definite head. Every time we meet we find that we've moved a step further on the road to discoveries. It makes me laugh to think that my early theories, which, only a few years ago, were scoffed at and looked upon as dreams, are taking shape. It's been a long, uphill fight. Science is beginning to win. It's all very wonderful." He noticed that Graham's cigar had gone out. With extreme politeness, such as a man would

use to very welcome guests, he held out a box of matches.

The boy took it. "I don't feel like smoking," he said, with a catch in his voice.

Something in his tone made the Doctor peer closely at him. "You look pale, my dear lad," he said, "pale and tired. Aren't you well?"

"Oh, yes; he's perfectly all right," said Peter hurriedly, trying to steer his father to another subject.

Graham threw his cigar away. "I'm not!" he cried, with a sudden, uncontrollable outburst. "I feel as rotten as I am. I can't sit here and listen to you, father. Don't be kind to me, I can't stand it." He put his head down between his hands and burst out crying like a boy.

The Doctor was startled. He got up quickly and stood hesitatingly. He wanted to put his hands on the boy's shoulders, but the sudden breakdown brought back his shyness. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Peter, do you know?"

Peter nodded. He then made up his mind to let things take their course. "Let him tell you," he said. "This may be the turning point for all three of us."

Graham drew the cheque-book out of his pocket, opened it and threw it on the desk under the reading lamp. "Look!" he said. "That's what I've come to."

For some moments the Doctor saw nothing but a cheque drawn by himself in favor of his second son for three thousand dollars. The fact that he didn't remember having made it out, and the fact that it was

for so large a sum made at first no impression upon him. He was so puzzled and so taken back at the sudden outburst of emotion which had broken up what he hoped was going to be a charming reunion that the sight of this cheque conveyed nothing to him. Both his sons watched him closely, not knowing what he would say or do. He was such a stranger to them — his feelings and characteristics were so unknown to them that they found themselves speculating as to the manner in which he would take this dreadful piece of dishonesty. A great surprise was in store for them.

When the Doctor realized what had been done,— that the signature on the cheque was not his own, although it was very cleverly copied,— they saw him wince and shut his eyes. After a moment of peculiar hesitation he drew his chair up to the desk and sat down. Holding his breath, Peter watched him tear the cheque out and quietly make out another for precisely the same amount. Then the Doctor got up and stood in front of Graham with the new cheque in his hand. All the sprightliness and exhilaration with which he had entered the room had left him. He looked old and thin and humble. His shoulders stooped a little and the cheque trembled in his hand.

"Am I such an ogre that my children are afraid to bring their troubles to me?" he said, in a broken voice. "What have I ever done to deserve this, Graham? You'd only to come to me and say that you needed money and I'd have given it to you. Who am I working for? For whom have I always worked?" He held out the cheque. "Take it, and if that isn't

enough ask me for more. I'd like to know why it is that you need it, if you'll be good enough to tell me; but, for God's sake, don't hurt me like this again."

Without a word — without, indeed, being able to find a word,— infinitely more crushed by this kindness than he would have been by an outburst of anger and reproach,— Graham took the cheque, turned on his heel and left the room, walking like a drunken man.

Peter watched him go. There was a feeling of great relief in his heart. Nothing that he could have done or said — nothing that Kenyon could have said in his most forcible manner, with all the weight of sophistication behind it, could have pulled Graham up and set him on a new path so well as the unexpected generosity of his father and the few pathetic words with which he underlined it.

But when Peter turned round to his father with the intention of taking him, for the first time, into his confidence and treating him as he would have treated Ranken Townsend under the same circumstances, he saw that the Doctor was crumpled up in his chair with his hands over his face and his shoulders shaking with sobs, and so he held his peace; and instead of obtaining the help that he needed so much he put his strong arm round his father in a strange protective way, as though he were the stronger man.

"Oh, don't, father," he said. "Please don't."

VII

THERE was a good reason why Kenyon didn't stay out his fortnight at Dr. Guthrie's house. He had already begun to know several young men whose very good feathers were waiting to be plucked. It was obviously impossible for him to invite them to East Fifty-second Street, and it became necessary, therefore, that he should take a bachelor-apartment in which to set up business. There he could play cards until any hour that suited him and settle down seriously to make his winter in New York a success. Also, he confessed to himself, the atmosphere of the Doctor's house was not conducive to his peace of mind or to his rigidly selfish way of life. He hadn't come over to the United States in order to play the fairy godmother, or even the family adviser to the young Guthries. He had worked hard to clear the one thing out of Graham's life which had rendered him useless, and he had had the satisfaction of seeing Peter's engagement broken, for which admirable accident he was profoundly grateful, because Peter also would now be free. In fact, these two brothers could now easily be brought to concentrate upon Kenyon's deserving case and take round to his apartment any friends of theirs who enjoyed gambling and could pay when they lost.

Kenyon possessed a neat and tidy brain. It was run on the same principle as a well-organized business office. It had its metaphorical card indexes, letter-

files and such like; so that when he made up his mind to go into his own quarters he gave the matter the closest and most careful consideration. He paid several visits to the well-known bachelor apartment-houses in and around West Forty-fourth Street. They would have been very suitable but for the existence of irksome rules and regulations as to ladies. He went further afield and, with Graham's assistance, examined several apartments in private houses. What he wanted was a place somewhere on the map where his breakfast would be cooked especially for him at any hour he desired, and which would be free of elevator boys, clerks, and the watchful eye of a manager. Finally he discovered exactly such a place on the second floor of a fairly large old-fashioned house in West Forty-eighth Street. In this the elderly lady who, as Kenyon at once saw, was blessed with the faculty of being able to look at things with a Nelsonian eye,— having, poor soul, to earn her living,— lived in the basement with her parrot and her Manx cat. Two young business men shared rooms on the first floor and a retired professor — who spent the greater part of his time in the country — rented the third floor. The servants slept in the attic.

Into this house Kenyon moved,— much against the wishes of all the Guthries, especially Belle,— the day after Peter's attempt to get in touch with his father came to such an utter failure. He was very well pleased with his quarters. They gave him elbow-room and freedom from the responsibility of looking after another man's sons. The sitting-room, arched in the

middle, ran from the front to the back of the house and it was well and discreetly furnished. There was a particularly nice old Colonial mirror over the mantel-piece, and what prints there were hanging on the walls were very pleasant. The bedroom across the passage would have been equally large had it not been broken up to provide a bath-room and a slip-room for baggage.

Fate, however, with its characteristic impishness, interfered with Kenyon's well-laid scheme. At the very hour when he was arranging his personal photographs a cable addressed to him was delivered at Dr. Guthrie's house. It so happened that Peter was in the hall when the servant took it in, and he started off at once to take it round to his friend. He was glad enough to seize any excuse to see Kenyon again. He felt horribly at a loose end. Graham's affairs had completely upset him and disarranged his plans. He was longing to see Betty, but was not going back on his agreement with Ranken Townsend until such time as he could make the artist eat his words; and, as to his father and his endeavor to break down that apparently insurmountable barrier, he was utterly disheartened and depressed. He was shown into Kenyon's rooms at the moment when he was standing in front of a very charming photograph of Baby Lennox which he had placed on the sideboard. It showed her in a little simple frock, with a wide-brimmed garden hat, standing among her roses with a smile on her face. She looked very young, pretty and flower-like.

"Hello, Peter!"

"I've brought this cable round. Otherwise I wouldn't have rushed in on you quite so soon."

"My dear old boy," said Kenyon, "you know very well that you have the complete run of whatever place I may be living in, at all hours of the day and night. A cable for me, eh? What the devil —? I was jolly careful to give my address here to very few people in England. Too many are anxious to serve me with summonses. Baby Lennox is going to be married, perhaps, and sends me the glad tidings. By Jove, I wonder who she's nabbed!" He shot out a laugh and tore open the envelope. "Oh, my God!"

"What is it?" asked Peter, anxiously.

Kenyon held out the cablegram and remained standing rigid, with his mouth open and his eyes shut, and his face as white as a stone.

It was from Baby Lennox. "Your father died last night. A heart attack. Come home at once."

"Oh, my dear Nick!" said Peter. "My dear old boy! I can't tell you how ——"

"No," said Kenyon; "don't say anything. Just sit down and wait for me. Whatever you do, don't go." And he went out of the room and across the passage to his bedroom, and shut himself in.

Peter waited. The few cold, definite and even brutal words contained in the cablegram would have hit him much harder and rendered his sympathy for his friend very much more real if he could have felt what it would have been to him to hear of the death of his own father. While he waited, mechanically holding that slip of paper between his fingers, his re-

spect for his friend's grief widened into an odd and powerful feeling of envy. The man who was dead had been infinitely more than a father. He had been a friend and a brother as well. It made him sick and cold to feel that the receipt of such a cablegram bringing to him the news of the death of his own father would have moved him only to extreme sympathy for his mother. He was ashamed and humiliated to realize that no actual grief would touch him, because his father was nothing more than a sort of kind but illusive guardian or a good-natured step-father — altogether unused to children — who effaced himself as much as he could and threw all responsibility upon his wife.

It was an hour before Kenyon reappeared, and during that time — which seemed to Peter no more than a few minutes — he went over again in his mind the scene which had taken place in the Doctor's laboratory, out of which he had gone stultified and thrown back upon himself. He was as grateful as Graham had been for the Doctor's generosity, but appalled at the thought that he had utterly failed to realize not only the gravity of Graham's act, but the long years of parental neglect which made such an act possible. It seemed to him that the way in which his father had taken that deplorable incident was all wrong. He should not have written another cheque. He should have had Graham up in front of him, strongly and firmly, and tried him as a judge would have tried him if his act had been discovered and dealt with by law. He should have gone into all the circumstances which led up to the forgery and thereby have cleared the way

for a new understanding. As it was, his acceptance of it was so weak that it gave Peter and Graham a feeling almost of contempt for that too kind man to whom children were obviously without significance, and the unmistakable knowledge that he was unable to understand his grave responsibility and the fact that he, alone among men, must take the blame for all their misdeeds and mistakes, because they had been allowed to enter life unwarned, unguided and unhelped. The outcome to Peter of this hour's bitter thought was finally this: That if news were brought to him at that moment of his father's death the only sorrow that he could feel would be at the fact that he felt no sorrow.

When Kenyon came back into the room it was with his usual imperturbability. He might merely have left it to answer the telephone or interview the man who had come to collect his clothes to be ironed. But his eyes were red. In his own peculiar way he had loved his father and admired him. It was the first time that he had wept since he had been a child.

"Thanks, so much, for waiting, old boy," he said. "I hope you've been smoking, or something."

"No," said Peter; "I have things to think about too."

Kenyon looked about, with a queer little smile. "I was just settling down," he said. "Very decent room, this, isn't it? Well, well, there it is. You never know your luck, eh?"

"When will you sail, Nick?"

"The first possible boat. Do you know anything about the sailings? Ah, this paper will have it. I

detest the sea and its everlasting monotony and blandness, and the dull-bright propinquity that it forces upon one." He opened the paper and searched among its endless columns for the Shipping News. "Here we are. 'Trans-Atlantic Sailings.' I have a wide choice, I see. There's a White Star and a Cunarder leaving to-morrow at twelve-thirty. The *Olympic,* I see! That's good enough,— if she's not full up. I'll see to it this afternoon. There's sure to be a cabin somewhere at this time of year."

"I shall miss you badly," said Peter.

"Thanks, old man. I know you will. And I shall hate going. Well, well!"

Peter picked up a book and put it down again; opened and shut a box of cigarettes and pushed a bowl of flowers nearer the middle of the table. "Do you want any — I mean, can I ——?"

Kenyon laid his hand on his friend's square shoulder. "Not this time, Peter, old son. Thanks, awfully. I've had one or two good nights and my pockets are full of dollars. They'll see me home with perfect comfort. Well, here ends my visit to the United States. To-morrow night I shall have left the hospitable Statue of Liberty behind me. But she'll see me again. I'll dash round in the morning and thank your people for their extreme kindness to me. You'll see me off, won't you?"

"Yes," said Peter; "of course."

"Of course. We won't dine to-night. I — I don't feel like it."

"I understand, old man," said Peter.

"So long, then."

"So long," said Peter.

"The Earl is dead!" said Kenyon, with a sudden break in his voice. "Long live the Earl!" And he raised his hand above his head.

VIII

Not for the first time in his comparatively short life, Nicholas Kenyon was able to put to the test his often boasted power of self-control. It was his creed to accept everything that might happen to him, whether good or bad, with equanimity. It was part of his training to allow nothing to interfere with the routine of his day and the particular scheme that he had worked out for himself. He was, however, utterly unprepared for his father's death. Only the day before he had received a very cheerful and amusing letter from the Earl of Shropshire which had provided him with many quiet chuckles. When the blow came in that sudden fashion it knocked him down and for an hour reduced him to the level of an ordinary human being — of a man who had not specialized in individualism and who did not set the earth revolving round himself as its hub. Shut up in his bedroom he gave way to his real and best emotions, the genuineness of which surprised him. He was a master egotist — a superindividualist — the very acme of selfishness. Therefore, odd as it may seem, he was somewhat ashamed of his deep feeling, because it proved to him that one of the links of his carefully forged chain of

philosophy was weak. He defined the word philosopher as one who is profoundly versed in the science of looking after himself.

As soon as Peter had left Kenyon's rooms, the new Earl of Shropshire took himself in hand and "carried on" as they do in the Navy after casualties, accidents and the issue of new orders. He continued to arrange his photographs round the room. He considered that he might as well make himself completely comfortable until the time came for him to pack up again and leave the country. He called up Belle on the telephone and had a little talk with her. He told her of his father's death and of the fact that he would have to sail within the next twenty-four hours. He listened with satisfaction to her cry of anguish, and arranged with her to come to see him that evening. It appeared that she was engaged to dine with some friends and go with them to hear Alfred Noyes read his poems at the Æolian Hall. He insisted upon her keeping her engagement and begged that she would come round to his rooms alone at eleven o'clock.

He didn't intend to leave the United States, even under such circumstances, without adding Belle to his little list of conquests. The cold-bloodedness of such an intention was peculiarly characteristic of the man. "No weakness," he said to himself —"no weakness. No matter what happens, what had happened, is happening or may happen, you must carry on. You've built up a creed, stick to it." And then, very quietly — having changed his tie to a black one — he went forth to discover the offices of the White Star Steamship

Company,—having obtained the proper directions from his landlady. He took the subway to the Battery, interviewed a clerk of Number One Broadway, had the good fortune to find that there was a state-room vacant on the boat deck of the *Olympic;* wrote his cheque for it; pocketed a bundle of labels; paid Graham a brief visit in his office on Wall Street and walked all the way home again, endeavoring to count the German names all along the most amazing street in the world, and giving up his temporary hobby in despair. On the way home he sent off a cable to Baby Lennox, giving her the name of the ship on which he was to sail. By this time he was tired and a little dazed at the amazing stir and bustle of Broadway, with its never-ceasing lines of cable-cars and its whir and rush of human traffic. He was glad of a cup of tea, and presently arranged himself for a quiet nap on the sofa in his sitting-room.

Later, with his mind concentrated solely on Belle's impending visit and what he intended to achieve, he dined alone at the Ritz, dropped in to see a turn or two at the Palace, and strolled back to Forty-eighth Street at half-past-ten. As he went into the house he heard the landlady talking to the two young business men who lived on the first floor. She was asking them to be good enough not to play the piano that evening, as the Professor had come back from the country and was very unwell. She had sent for the doctor, and he would be more comfortable if the house were as silent as it could be made.

Knowing that Belle would be punctual that night,

of all nights, he went down just before eleven o'clock and waited for her at the front door. It was his intention to get her into the house unobserved, more for his own sake than for hers. The night was clear, but half a gale was blowing, carrying before it all the dust of the city and sending odd pieces of paper swirling into the air and making the hanging signs outside shops and small restaurants creak and groan. In its strong, vibrating song there was a note of wild passion that fitted exquisitely into Kenyon's frame of mind.

Belle drove up in a taxicab a few minutes after eleven. "Not a word until we get upstairs," said Kenyon, as he helped her out. And then when she stood in his sitting-room, with all her emotions in a state of upheaval, nothing was said for many minutes. He took her in his arms and kissed her, delighting in her young beauty and freshness with all the appreciation of a connoisseur.

There seemed to Belle to be no indiscretion in this visit. Was she not engaged to be married to this man?

As a matter of fact, she was not. Kenyon had been playing with her; and now that he had succeeded to his father's title he had even less intention of dealing seriously by her than ever before. Marriage was not in his thoughts or plans. The title was his and the old house that went with it, but he was no better off than he had been as Nicholas Kenyon, the Oxford undergraduate. On the contrary he now had responsibilities of which he had hitherto been free and he must look out for some one who could buy his name for a substantial sum. If Belle had read into his vague and

indefinite remarks a proposal of marriage it only showed that she possessed a very lively imagination. He was not going at that point to undeceive her. He was merely going to take from her everything that she was gracious enough to give. His trip to New York had provided him with very little in actual substance. He was determined that it should not be altogether empty, and that Belle should furnish him with a charming memento.

He broke into Belle's preliminary remarks of conventional condolence by saying, "Thank you; but please don't say a word about my father. Let's talk about ourselves. We're alive. The next few hours are our property. Let's make them memorable. Let's give each other something that we can never forget." And he took her cloak and led her to a chair as though she were a queen, and stood looking at her with very greedy eyes.

But Belle's temperament was Latin. Ever since Kenyon had spoken to her over the telephone she had been unable to control her feelings. She loved this man overwhelmingly. She had given him all her heart, which had never been touched before. To her it seemed amazingly cruel that fate had come along with its usual lack of sympathy and circumspection and put a sudden end to all the delightful hours to which she had been looking forward. The death of a man whom she didn't know meant very little to her. She was young, and to the young what is death but a vague mystery, an inconvenient accident which seems to affect every one but themselves? Indeed, she rather

resented the fact that Kenyon's father, in dying, was to take so suddenly out of her life the one human being about whom her entire happiness revolved.

"Oh, Nicholas, Nicholas! Must you go? Must you leave me? Let me go with you. I have the right. I shall be miserable and unhappy without you." And she clung to him with all the unreasonableness of a child.

Kenyon was not in the least touched by this appeal — only extremely pleased, because it showed him that Belle was in the right mood to be won. He put his hand on her round, white shoulder. "You must be brave," he said. "I know how you feel, but you must help me. Don't make things more difficult than they are. I may be able to come back quite soon,— who can tell?"

"I believe you're glad to go!" cried Belle.

Kenyon drew back. He wanted to make her feel that she had hurt him. He succeeded.

In an instant, full of self-reproach, Belle was on her feet and in his arms again. "What am I going to do without you? I almost wish you'd never come into my life. I've been looking forward to your being here the whole winter. How am I going to get through the days alone?"

A motor-car drew up at the house. Neither of them heard Dr. Guthrie's voice giving a quick order to the chauffeur or recognized his step as he passed upstairs on the way to see his friend, the Professor, on the floor above, to whom he had been called by the landlady.

Presently, having turned out all the lights except a shaded lamp on the table, Kenyon began to let himself go. He threw aside his characteristic calmness and became the lover — the passionate, adoring man who was about to be separated, under tragic circumstances, from the girl who was equally in love. He threw aside his first intention of finessing Belle into his bedroom on the plea of asking her to help him to pack. He remembered that the old man above was ill and that the landlady and others would be passing to and fro. This was distinctly annoying. He was, however, a past-master in the art that he was at present pursuing and set the whole of his mind on his opportunity. Belle was, naturally enough, as putty in his hands and her despair at losing him made her weak and pliable.

He sat down on the sofa and held Belle in his arms and kissed her again and again. "I love you! I love you! I don't know — I can't think what I shall be like without you," he said, bringing all his elaborate cunning to play upon her feelings. "More like a man who's lost his arms than anything; and we were to have come nearer and nearer this winter, finding out all the best of each other and all the joy that it is to love wholly and completely."

"Oh, don't go, don't go!" cried Belle, making a pathetic and almost child-like refrain of the words, "I love you so! I love you so!"

Kenyon bent down with her until her head was pillowed on the cushions, and kissed her lips and eyes. "You must love me, sweetheart, you must. It's the only thing that I can turn to and count on now. Go on

loving me every minute that I'm away. I shall need it,— and before I go let me have the precious proof of your love to store up in my heart. Give me the priceless gift that is the only thing to keep me living till I come back."

"Nicholas, Nicholas!" she whispered, with her young breasts heaving against him. "I love you so! I love you so!"

The moment of his triumph had almost been reached when the Doctor, on his way down, saw something glistening in the passage outside Kenyon's sitting-room. He stooped and picked it up. He was puzzled to see that it was a little brooch that he had given to Belle on one of her birthdays. Her initials had been worked on it in diamonds. For several moments he held it in his hand, wondering how it could have been dropped in that place. He was utterly unaware of the fact that Kenyon lived in the house which he knew to be given up to bachelors. Then the blood rushed into his head. Almost for the first time in his life the Doctor acted on the spur of the moment. He was filled with a sudden sense of fear before which his inherent shyness and hesitancy were swept completely away. He tried to open the door. It was locked. He hammered upon it, shouting: "Let me in! Let me in!"

Kenyon, cursing inwardly, sprang up from the sofa. "It's your father," he said. "Go and sit by the table, quick, and pretend to be arranging these photographs." He could have ignored that knocking, but the result would be that the Doctor would go down to the land-

lady and there would be a scandal. How in the name of thunder did he know that Belle was in the room? He dashed over to the mantel-piece, collected a handful of his pictures and threw them on the table in front of Belle, who, with a touch of panic, tried to smooth her hair. Then he went to the door and opened it.

"Good evening, Doctor," he said quietly. "This is very kind of you. Belle is here helping me to pack, and Peter should have been here, but I expect something has detained him. Do come in." He saw the brooch in the Doctor's hand and cursed Belle's carelessness.

As Dr. Guthrie entered the room the blood slowly left his head. A feeling of intense relief pervaded him. He saw Belle sitting at the table with the utmost composure putting one photograph on top of another. At his side stood the man who had recently been his honored guest and who was the best friend of his eldest son,— the man of whose sad loss he had heard that afternoon from his wife. He thanked God that everything was well and hastened to accept Kenyon's suggestion that he had come there for the purpose of saying good-bye to him. It saved him from the appearance of having lost his head and made a fool of himself. "I — I'm indeed grieved to hear of your father's death, my dear Mr. Kenyon," he said, stammering a little. "I was called to see an old friend of mine who lives in this house, who isn't at all well, and I thought I'd take the opportunity on my way down ——"

"I'm deeply obliged to you," said Kenyon, giving the weak, nervous man before him the credit of having seized the hint so quickly. "It helps me very much to have so many good friends. I sail to-morrow at two-thirty. This is a good opportunity for me to thank you very much for your delightful hospitality. Will you wait for Peter?"

"No; I think not, thanks," said the Doctor. "It's getting late and, as you say, Peter has in all probability been detained. Belle, dear, I think you'd better come with me, now."

Kenyon was still quite placid and courteous and undaunted. "Oh, but mayn't she stay until Peter turns up?"

"I think not," replied the Doctor, astonished at his own firmness. "It's very late."

"Curse it! Curse it!" cried Kenyon, inwardly. But with a little smile he went over to Belle and gave her his hand. "You've helped me a lot," he said. "I can easily finish packing now. Good night and good-bye."

Choking back her sobs and full of resentment at her father's clumsiness and interference, Belle rose and allowed Kenyon to help her into her cloak.

By a strange accident she, like Graham, had been saved from a disaster which might have followed her into the future. God's hand must have been stretched out to help that man, who, by his unconscious neglect, had made it possible for these two children of his to stand on the brink of irreparable misfortune.

Kenyon, keeping up a quiet flow of conventional

remarks, followed them down-stairs and out into the street. He could have drawn Belle back into the hall while the Doctor went out to the car, and kissed her once again. But,— it was over, what was the use. He watched her fling herself into the motor-car and sit all hunched up with her hands over her face, and then he took the Doctor's hand and shook it warmly. All the angels in Heaven must have shuddered as he did so, and cried, "Judas! Judas!"

"Good-bye again, then," said the Doctor. "I'm deeply sorry for the reason that takes you away from us. I hope we may see you again soon."

"I hope so, too," said Kenyon.

Standing in that quiet street he watched the automobile drive away, and cursed. His mind was filled with impotent rage. He felt as he did when he was a child and some one had hurt him. He wanted to find the thing which that some one treasured most and break it all to pieces, and stamp on it. Then he returned to his rooms, switched on all the lights, and with a gesture almost animalish in its baffled passion, swept all the photographs from the table.

He was kicking them savagely, one after another, when he heard the whistle which he and Peter had used at Oxford to attract each other's attention. He ran to the window and opened it. There stood Peter with a glint of moonlight on his great square shoulders.

"Come up!" said Kenyon. "By God, my luck's come back! Now I can make that old fool pay for ruining my evening!"

IX

With a fiendish scheme in the back of his head and with a most unpleasant smile on his face, Kenyon went over to the sideboard. He brought out two glasses. In one he mixed a whiskey high-ball and in the other he poured a concoction of neat whiskey and brandy, adding everything else that his bottles contained,—a mixture calculated to dull the senses even of the most hardened drinker. Then he waited — still with this unpleasant smile upon his face.

When Peter came in he looked tired and pale. His boots were covered with dust and there were beads of perspiration on his forehead. "I saw that you were up," he said, "so I whistled. If you hadn't called out I should have gone home. Hope you don't mind."

"Mind!" cried Kenyon. "I never was so glad to see anybody in my life. You look like a tramp. Where've you been?"

Peter threw his hat on the sofa and sat down heavily. "I wasn't in the mood to go home to dinner. I've been walking hard ever since I saw you. God knows where I've been. At one time I stood under the apartment-house in Gramercy Park. It's a wonder I didn't go up and have it out again with Ranken Townsend. But it wouldn't have been any use."

"Not the smallest," said Kenyon. "You'd only have given him the satisfaction of standing on his hind-legs and preaching to you. Will you have something to eat?"

Peter shook his head.

"Well, then, have a drink." And he put the poison in front of Peter. "I was going to drink to myself, — a rather dull proceeding alone. Now you can join me. On your feet, Peter, old man, and with no heel-taps, I give you 'the new Peer'. The most decorative member of England's aristocracy — Nicholas Augustus Pittbugh Kenyon, Eighth Earl of Shropshire, master of Thrapstone-Wynyates — the man without a shilling!" Let it go!"

Peter stood up, clinked his friend's glass with his own, emptied it and set it down. "Good Lord!" he said, with a frightful grimace. "What in thunder was that?"

Kenyon burst into a derisive laugh. "'Some drink,' as you say over here. Away goes your water-wagon, Master Peter. Off you come from your self made pedestal. Drunk and incapable will be the words that will presently be very fitly applied to you, my immaculate friend." And he laughed again, as though it were a great joke. It would do him good to see Peter "human," as he called it, for once, to satisfy his sense of revenge — to pay out Dr. Guthrie for his cursed interference.

Peter was glad to get back to his chair. "I don't care what happens to me," he said. "What does it matter? I've got nothing to live for — a father who doesn't care a damn what becomes of me, and a girl who's given me up without a struggle."

He had had nothing to eat since the middle of the day. He was mentally and physically weary. Al-

though he was unaware of the fact, he had caught a severe chill. It was not surprising that the horrible concoction which Kenyon had deliberately mixed went straight to his head.

Everything vile lying at the bottom of Kenyon's nature had been stirred up. At that moment he cared nothing for his friend's repeated generosity, his consistent loyalty and his golden friendship. With a sort of diabolical desire to amuse himself and see humiliated in front of him the man who had stuck to his principles so grimly, he filled his glass again, to make certainty doubly certain. "This time," he cried, "I'll give you another toast. Come on, now. On your feet again, and drink to 'that most charming family, the Guthries, and in particular to the eldest son — to the dear, good boy who has run straight and never been drunk, and has treated women with such noble chivalry. In a word, to Peter, the virgin man.'" He raised his glass, and so did Peter. This time the stuff almost choked him and he set his glass down only half empty. But he put on a brave front and sat up straight, laughing a little. "Nice rooms, these," he said. "Large and airy. Bit nicer than our first rooms at Oxford, eh?" How different this hideous poison made him look. Already he was like a fine building blurred by mist.

"It's extraordinary what you dry heroes can do when you try," said Kenyon. "All I hope is that you'll come face to face with your fond parent presently when you fumble your way into your beautiful home." He bent down and picked up his photographs and went on talking as though to himself. "Yes,

there's some satisfaction in making others pay. I've tried it before, and know. I remember that plebeian little hunx at Oxford who was going into the Church. His name was Jones,— or something of the sort. I think he was a damned Welshman. He once called me a 'card sharp.' I didn't forget it. The first night he turned up in his Parson's clothes I doped him and he woke up next morning in the gutter. I loved it. Now, then, Peter, give me a hand with these things and bring them across the passage to my bedroom." He pointed to some books and left the room with his photographs.

Peter got up unsteadily and rocked to and fro. He picked up the books as he was directed and staggered after his friend. He lurched into the bedroom and stood in the doorway, supporting himself. "I'm — I'm drunk," he said, thickly. "Hopelessly drunk. Wha— what the devil have you done to me?"

Kenyon burst out laughing. Many times he had threatened to do this for his friend, whose attitude of consistent healthiness and simplicity had always irritated him. He delighted at that moment in seeing Peter all befogged and helpless and as wholly unable to look after himself as though he were a baby.

"Now you'd better go," he said sharply. He was tired with the episode. "I'm sick of the Guthries! Go home and cling to your bed while it chases round the room. I'll have mercy on you however to this extent. I'll put you in a taxi. There's sure to be one outside the hotel down the street. Come on, you hulking ex-Oxford man. Lean on me. Rather a para-

dox, isn't it? Hitherto I've always leaned on you." He got his visitor's hat and jammed it on his head, all cock-eyed. And then, still talking and jibeing and sneering, he led the uncertain Peter down-stairs.

There were two taxicabs drawn up outside the hotel to which Kenyon had referred. He shouted and waved his hand. A chauffeur mounted his box, manœuvred the car around and drove up, glad to get a fare.

As he did so, a night butterfly flitted past, on her way home. She had had apparently an unsuccessful evening, for she stopped at the sight of these two men. Her rather pretty, thin, painted face wore an eager, anxious look. "Hello, dearie!" she said, and touched Kenyon on the arm.

"By Jove!" said Kenyon to himself. "By Jove!"

He was struck with a new inspiration. He had made his friend drunk. Good! Now he would send him off with a woman of the streets. That would complete his evening's work in the most artistic fashion, and render Peter human at last. And who could tell? It might hit the Doctor fair and square,—"the tactless, witless, provincial fool."

"Wait a second," he said to the girl, and with the able assistance of the driver put the almost inanimate and poisoned Peter into the cab. Then he turned. The night bird was eyeing him with a curious wistfulness. She was too smartly dressed and the white tops of her high boots gleamed sarcastically. "Well, dearie?"

"There's a customer for you," said Kenyon, jerk-

ing his finger towards the cab. "Take him home. He has money in his pocket. Help yourself."

The girl gave the driver her address — which was somewhere in the Sixties — and then, with a little chuckle, jumped in and drew the door to behind her with a bang that echoed through the sleeping street.

The cab drove away, and Kenyon's laugh went after it.

He was revenged.

X

But for the chauffeur, a burly and obliging Irishman, Nellie Pope's unwilling and unconscious customer would never have reached her rooms. They were on the top floor of a brown-stone house which had no elevator. The struggle to earn his own daily bread made the chauffeur sympathetic. So he got Peter over his shoulder, as though he were a huge sack, and carried him step by step up the narrow, ill-lit, echoing staircase. On the top landing he waited, breathing hard, while the girl opened the door with her latch-key.

"Where'll I put him?"

"Bring 'im into the bedroom," said the girl. "I'm sure I'm obliged to you for the trouble you've taken, mister. You'll 'ave a glass of beer before you go down, won't you?"

"Sure!"

He lumped Peter on to the bed with an exclamation of relief. It groaned beneath his dead weight. Mop-

ping his brow and running his fingers through a shock of thick, dry hair, the Irishman looked down at the great body of his own customer's evening catch. "I guess I've seen a good many drunks before," he said, "but this feller's fairly paralyzed. It's a barrel he must have had, or perhaps he's shot himself with one of them needle things. Anyway, he's a fine-looking chap."

Nellie Pope, who had heard these remarks as she was pouring out a bottle of beer,— it was one of those apartments in which every sound carries from room to room and in which when you are seated in the kitchen it is possible to hear a person cleaning his teeth in the bathroom,— went in and stood at the elbow of the chauffeur. Switching on a light over the bed she peered into Peter's face. Her own lost most of its prettiness under the glare. There were hollows and sharpnesses here and there, the roots of the hair round her temples were darker than the too-bright gold of the rest of it. There was, however, something kind, and even a little sweet about her English cockney face and shrewd eyes. "Yes 'e's a fine looking chap, isn't 'e,— a bit of a giant, too, and looks like a gentleman. Poor boy, I wonder what that feller did to 'im!" She put her hand on Peter's head and drew it back quickly. "'E's got a fever, I should think. It looks as if I should 'ave to play nurse to-night. Oh, I beg pardon, mister, 'ere's your beer."

The Irishman took the glass, held it up against the light, made a curious Kaffir-like click with his tongue and threw back his head. "I guess that went down

fine," said he. "One dollar and ten cents from you, Miss, and I'll make no charge for extras." He held out a great horny hand.

Nellie Pope opened her imitation gold bag. "Bin out o' luck lately," she said. "Don't know whether I've got — No, I 'aven't. Oh, I know!" With a little laugh she bent over Peter again and hunted him over for some money. Finding a small leather case she opened it. It contained a wad of bills. With a rather comical air of haughty unconcern she handed the chauffeur two dollars. "Keep the change," she said.

He laughed, pocketed the money, handed back the glass and went off, shutting the door behind him.

Miss Pope, who had a tidy mind as well as an economical nature, took the glass into the kitchen and finished the bottle herself. And then, without removing her hat and gloves she sat down and counted the money that was contained in the case. "One hundred and twenty-five dollars," she said. "Some little hevening!"

She put the case into her bag, where it lay among a handkerchief, steeped in a too-pungent scent, a small, round box of powder, a stick of lip salve, and a few promiscuous dimes. Then she took off her hat — a curious net-like thing round which was wound two bright feathers — her coat and her gloves. The latter she blew out tenderly, almost with deference. They were white kid. All these she put very carefully on a scrupulously clean dresser. Singing a little song she arranged a meal for herself on the table, — having

first laid a cloth. Bread, butter and sardines made their appearance, with the remains of a chocolate cake which had been greatly to the taste of her last night's customer, who had not been, however, a very generous person. Extremely hungry, she sat down and, with the knowledge that her purse was full, laid on the butter with a more careless hand than usual. While she ate she enjoyed the bright dialogue of Robert Chambers in a magazine which, having first broken its back in order to keep it open, she propped up against a bowl. Half way through the meal, she jumped up suddenly. "'Ere!" she said. "You can't leave that poor boy like that, you careless cat, and 'im lying with a fever!" She went swiftly into the bedroom, and once more stood looking down at the inert form of poor old Peter. Then she laughed at the difficulty of taking off his clothes, and with a shrug of her shoulders started pluckily at his boots. She hung the coat and waistcoat over the back of one of the chairs,—there were only two,—and having folded the trousers with great care, returned to her supper. It was after two o'clock when finally she crept quietly into bed.

XI

A LITTLE over twenty-four years before, Nellie Pope had been born to two honest, hard-working country folk. They lived in a village of about two dozen cottages a stone's throw from the great cross cut by the Romans on the chalky side of Chiltern Hills, in

England. Her parents' quiver had already been a full one and there was indeed very little room in it for the new arrival. Eight other boys and girls had preceded her with a rapidity which must have surprised nature herself, bounteous as she is. The father, a deep-chested, brown-bearded, very ignorant, but good-natured man, worked all the year round on a farm. His wages were fourteen shillings a week. The wife, who had been a domestic servant, added to the family pot by taking in washing and, if able, helping at the big house when guests were there. Neither of them had ever been farther away from their native village than the town which lay in the saucer of the valley, the steeple of whose church could be seen glinting in the sun away below.

Little Nellai, as she was called, was thrown on her own resources from the moment that she could crawl out of the narrow kitchen door into the patch of garden where potatoes grew and eager chickens played the scavenger for odd morsels of food. Her eldest sister was her real mother, and it was she who daily led her little brood of dirty-faced children out into the beech forest which stood in strange silence behind the cottage. The monotonous years slipped by one after another, enlivened only by a death or a birth or a fight, or a very occasional jaunt to the town in one of the farm wagons, perched up on a load of hay or wedged in between sacks of potatoes. Little Nellai's pretty face and fair hair very soon made her a pet of the lady at the big house, and it was from this kind, but mistaken person, from whom she obtained

the seeds of discontent which at the early age of sixteen sent her into the town as a "help" in the kitchen of a man who kept a garage. It was from this place, on the main road to London, that Nellie Pope saw life for the first time and became aware of the fact that the world was a larger place than the little village perched up so near the sky, and caught the fever of discovery from the white dust that was left behind by the cars which sped to London one way, and to Oxford the other.

During this first year among shops and country louts, Nellie became aware of the fact that her pretty face and fair hair were very valuable assets. They procured her candies and many other little presents. They enabled her to make a choice among the young men with whom to walk out. They won smiles and pleasant words not only from the chauffeurs of the cars which came into her master's garage to be attended to, but also from their owners. Eventually it was one of these — more unscrupulous than most — who, staying for a few days at the "Red Lion," carried Nellie away with him to London, after several surreptitious meetings in the shady lane at the back of the churchyard. There it was that she saw life with very naked eyes, passed quickly from one so-called protector to another, was taken to the United States by one of a troupe of gymnasts, and then deserted. For two years she had been numbered among the night birds who flit out after dark — a member of the oldest profession in the world. There were, however, no moments in her life — hard, terrible and sordid as it

was — when she looked back with anything like regret at those heavily thatched cottages which stood among their little gardens on the side of the hills. She could put up with the danger, brutality and unveracity, the gross actuality of her present life, with courage, cheerfulness and even optimism, but the mere thought of the deadly monotony of that peaceful village where summer followed winter with unerring routine, made her shudder. The first pretty frock which had been given her by the lady of the big house had begun the work. The candles and the little presents from the country house had completed it; and here she was, still very young, with a heart still kind and with a nature not yet warped and brutalized — a danger to any community in which she lived, the deliberate spreader of something so frightful that science and civilization stood abashed in her presence.

Nature has much to answer for, and out of nature spring many plants whose tempting berries are filled with poison.

It was in the bed of this wretched little woman that the unconscious Peter slept that night.

It was ten o'clock in the morning when the weary girl faced another day. She didn't grumble at the fact that she had been frequently disturbed and had watched many of the hours go by while she attended to Peter with something of the spirit of a Magdalen. She kept repeating to herself: "Poor boy! Poor boy! I wonder what his mother would say if she saw him like this."

She bathed his head, listened with astonishment to

his babbling, and tried to piece together his incoherent pleading with Ranken Townsend and his declarations to Betty of his everlasting love. She listened with acute interest to the broken sentences which showed her that this great big man-boy was endeavoring to stir up his father to do something which seemed to him to be urgent and vital, and she wondered who Graham was, and Nicholas.

The first thing that she did when she was dressed and had put the kettle on her gas stove to boil, was to hunt through Peter's pockets to find out who he was. It was obvious to her that he was not so much a customer as a patient. She was a little afraid of accepting the whole responsibility of his case. The only letter she found was one signed "Graham," headed with the address of an office in Wall Street. In the corner of it was printed a telephone number. Graham, it was plain to her, was a Christian name. She could find no suggestion of the surname of the writer or of the man who lay so heavily in the next room.

"I dunno," she said to herself. "Something has got to be done. That boy's in a bad way. 'E's as 'ot as a pancake and I shouldn't think 'e's used to drink by the way 'e takes it. Suppose hanything should 'appen to 'im 'ere. I should look funny. What 'ad I better do?"

What she did was to have breakfast. During this hasty meal she thought things over — all her hard-won practicality at work in her brain. Then she put on her befeathered hat and her white gloves, a second-best pair of shoes, and went out and along the street,

and into the nearest drug store. Here she entered the telephone booth and asked for the number that was printed on Graham's note. By that time it was just after nine o'clock. Having complied with the sharp request to slip the necessary nickel into the slot, an impatient voice recited the name of the firm. "I want to speak to Mr. Graham," she said. "No such name —? Well, keep your 'air on, Mister. I may be a client — a millionaire's wife — for all you know. I'm asking for Mr. Graham and as 'e's a friend of mine, and probably your boss, I'm not bothering about his surname. You know that as well as I do — Do I mean Mr. Graham Guthrie? Well, yes. Who else should I mean?" She gave a chuckle of triumph. "All right! I'll 'old on."

In a moment or two there was another voice on the telephone. "How d'you do?" she said. "I'm holding a letter signed by you, to 'Dear Peter,'— Ah! I thought that would make you jump — It doesn't matter what my name is. What's that —? Yes, I *do* know where he is. I've been looking after 'im all night. Come up to my place right away and I'll be there to meet you. Dear Peter is far from well." She gave her address, and feeling immensely relieved left the box. But before she left the store she treated herself to a large box of talcum powder and a medium-sized bottle of her favorite scent, paying the bill with Peter's money. She considered herself to be fully justified.

On the way home she dropped into a delicatessen shop and bought some sausages, a bottle of pickles, a

queer German salad of raw herring chopped up with carrots and onions, and carried these away with her. On her way up-stairs — the bald, hard stairs — she was greeted by a half-dressed person whose hair was in curl-papers and who had opened her door to pick up a daily paper which lay outside. "Hello, Miss Pope! Anything doing?" "Yes," said Nellie Pope, "the market's improving," and she laughed and went on.

Peter was still lying inert when she bent over him once more. She felt his head again, put the covers about his shoulders, pulled the blind more closely over the window, and after having put the food away returned to make up her face. She wasn't going to be caught looking what she called "second-rate" by this Mr. Graham Guthrie when he came.

There being no need to practice rigid economy at that moment, she gave herself a glass of beer and sat down to pass the time with her magazine, in which life was regarded through very rosy spectacles.

When finally she opened the door, in response to a loud and insistent ring, her answer to Graham's abrupt question: "Is my brother *here?*" was "Yes; why shouldn't he be?" She didn't like the tone. The word "here" was underlined in an unnecessarily unpleasant manner.

XII

"WHAT's my brother doing here?" asked Graham.

"What d'you s'pose? Better go and ask 'im yourself."

"Where is he?"

"In bed, if you must know." The girl answered sharply. She found her caller supercilious. She followed him into the bedroom, telling herself that this was a nice way to be treated for all the trouble that she had taken.

Graham bent over the bed. "Good God!" he said. "What's the matter with him?"

"Drink!" said the girl drily.

"Drink! He never drinks."

"Then 'e must 'ave fallen off the water-wagon into a barrel of alcohol and opened 'is mouth too wide. Also 'e's got a fever."

Graham turned on the girl. "How did he get here?"

"In a cab. You don't s'pose I carried 'im, d'you?"

"Where'd you find him?"

"I didn't find 'im. Some one gave 'im to me as a present — a nice present, I must say."

"Don't lie to me!" cried Graham. "And don't be impudent."

"Impudent!" cride Nellie Pope, shrilly. "Here, you'd better watch what you're saying. I don't stand any cheek, I don't, neither from you nor anybody else, and I'm not in the habit of lying. I tell you I was made a present of 'im. I was told to take 'im 'ome by a young fellow on Forty-eighth Street, who 'ad called up a cab."

"Forty-eighth Street,— are you sure?"

"Well, if I don't know the streets, who does? The

young fellow was a gent. He didn't talk, he gave orders. He was tall and slight and he 'ad kinky hair. Quite a nut. English, he was, any one could tell that."

"Good God!" thought Graham —"Kenyon." He sat down on the bed as though he had received a blow in the middle of his back. Only an hour before he had telephoned to Kenyon to say good-bye and wish him a pleasant crossing, and all that he said about Peter was that they had seen each other the night before. "No doubt he's all right," he had said, in answer to Graham's anxious question. What did it all mean? What foul thing had Kenyon done?

Graham had been up all night waiting for his brother. He had good news for him. He had pulled himself together and gone to see Ranken Townsend during the time that Peter had been walking the streets. To the artist he had made a clean breast of everything, so that he might, once for all, set Peter right in the eyes of his future father-in-law. That was the least that he could do. He had carried away from the studio in his pocket a short, generous and impulsive letter from the artist, asking Peter's forgiveness for not having accepted his word of honor. Armed with this, Graham had waited while hour after hour slipped by, growing more and more anxious as Peter did not appear. At breakfast he told his mother — in case she should discover that Peter had not returned — that he had stayed the night in Kenyon's rooms, as they had much to talk about and one or two things to arrange. He had been in the house when Kenyon

had rung up, apologizing for being unable to come round, and thanking Mrs. Guthrie for her kindness and hospitality.

And there lay Peter inanimate and stupefied. In the name of all that was horrible, what had happened? Graham got up and faced the girl again. "You mustn't mind my being abrupt and rude," he said. "I'm awfully sorry. But this is my brother, my best pal, and I've been terribly anxious about him, and you don't know — nobody knows — what it means to me to see him like this."

"Ah! Now you're talking," said Nellie Pope. "Treat me nicely and there's nothing I won't do for you. If you ask me — and if I don't know a bit more about life than you do I ought to — I have a shrewd idea that your brother was made drunk,— that is, *doped*. 'E was quite gone when 'e was put into the cab, and from the way that kinky-headed chap laughed as we drove off together,— I mean me and your brother,— I should think that 'e 'ad it in for him, but of course I don't know hanything about that. Perhaps you do."

Graham shook his head. "No," he said; "I don't know anything about it either. But what are we going to do with him, that's the point? He's ill, that's obvious, and a doctor ought to see him at once."

"That's what I think," said the girl, "and I don't think 'e ought to be moved, 'e's so frightfully 'ot. 'E might catch pneumonia, or something. What I think you'd better do is to call up a doctor at once, get him to give your brother a dose and give me directions as

to what to do. 'E can stay 'ere until 'e's all right again, and I'll nurse 'im."

"Yes, but why should you ——?"

"Oh, bless you, that's all right. I'm glad to have something to do. Time hangs heavy. Besides, the poor boy is just like a baby. I like 'im and you needn't be afraid that I shall try to get anything out of 'im, because I shan't."

Graham snatched eagerly at the proffered assistance. He was intensely grateful. "Have you a telephone here?" he asked.

Nellie Pope laughed. "What d'you take me for?" she said. "I'm not a chorus lady. When I want to use the 'phone I pop round to the drug store and have a nickel's worth. That's how I got on to you."

Graham caught up his hat and left the apartment quickly. One of his college friends was a doctor and had just started to practice. He would ask him to come and see Peter. He agreed with the girl that it would be running a great risk to move Peter, and he was all against taking him home in his present condition. It would only lead to more lies and would certainly throw his mother into a dreadful state of anxiety.

While he was gone, Nellie Pope set to work to tidy up the bedroom. She put her boots away in a closet, got out a clean bedspread, rubbed the powder off her mirror and arranged her dressing-table. This doctor, whoever he was, should find her apartment as tidy as she could make it. It was a matter of pride with her. She still had some of that left. One thing, however,

she was determined about. The doctor must not be allowed to look too closely at her.

XIII

Graham came out of the telephone box in the drug store. Dr. Harding was unable, he said, to leave his office for an hour and a half, when he would drive to Nellie Pope's address and meet Graham in her apartment.

But as he was hurrying back to Peter's bedside, Graham drew up suddenly. The rage that had entered into his soul when he had gathered that Kenyon was responsible for his brother's condition broke into a blaze. Almost before he knew what he was doing or what he was going to do when he got there, he hailed a passing taxi and told the man to drive to Kenyon's apartment. He remembered that the liner was not due to leave until two-thirty. Kenyon would therefore be at home for some time yet. He told himself that he *must* see him — he must. He owed it to Peter first, and then to himself as Peter's brother and pal, to make Kenyon answer for this dirty and disloyal trick. Yes, that was it, he told himself as the cab bowled quickly to its destination. Kenyon must be made to answer, or, at any rate, to offer some extenuating explanation if he could. It would be something that would make him wake up in the middle of the night and curse himself if he let the opportunity slip out of his hands to face Kenyon up before he went

immaculately, unquestioned and perhaps unpunished out of their lives. How could he face Peter when he was well again? How could he look at his own reflection in the looking-glass if, for reasons of his personal admiration of Kenyon and disinclination to force things to an issue, he let him escape without finding out the truth?

The cab stopped. Graham sprang out, paid the man, ran up the flight of stone steps and rang the bell. None too quickly it was answered by a girl with a mass of black hair and a pair of Irish eyes which had been put in with a dirty finger.

"Is Mr. Kenyon in?"

"Yes."

The hall was filled with baggage. A very distinct "K" was on all the baggage tabs.

"All right!" said Graham. "I know my way up."

Rather sharply Kenyon called out "Come in! when Graham knocked on the door of the sitting-room.

In a much-waisted suit of brown clothes, a brown tie and a pair of brown shoes which were so highly polished as to look almost hot, Kenyon was standing with the telephone receiver to his ear. He was saying "Good-bye" to one of the men to whom Graham had been proud to introduce him and whose pockets he had already lightened by a fairly considerable sum. He finished speaking before turning to see who had entered, and hung up the receiver.

"Oh, hello, my dear fellow!" he said. "I didn't

expect to see you. How extremely and peculiarly pleasant!"

Graham wondered if he would think so by the time that he had done with him. But, with a strong effort of will, he kept his self-control. He intended to let Kenyon give himself away. That seemed to be the best plan.

Kenyon gave him no chance to speak. "Not satisfied with wishing me 'bon voyage' over the wire, eh? By jove, this is most friendly of you. You'll help kill the boring time before I drive off to the docks with all my duly and laboriously labelled luggage. Make yourself at home, old boy, and give me your news."

He took his hat and stick and yellow gloves out of the one comfortable chair and waved his hand toward it.

Graham remained standing. Having seen Peter lying in such a bed, inert and humiliated,— Peter, of all men,— he resented Kenyon's suave cordiality and glib complacency. "I've just come from Peter," he said.

Kenyon burst out laughing. "Oh, do tell me! How does he look? Is his head as big as the dome of St. Paul's this morning? It ought to be. I gave him the sort of mixture that would blow most men sky-high. It's never been known to fail."

"It hasn't?" said Graham. "So you *did* give it to him!" he added inwardly. "Good! You'll pay for *that*."

"I was amazed to see the thirsty way our abstem-

ious Peter lapped it down. I've a sneaking notion that he liked it. It was on an empty stomach, too. He seems to have been in an emotional mood yesterday — tramping the streets. Ye gods, how these sentimentalists go to pieces under the influence of a bit of a girl! He came up here fairly late, just after Belle — I mean, just after ——"

"Belle? Was Belle here last night, then?" Graham's voice rang out sharply.

"Yes," said Kenyon, with a curious smile. After all, what did it matter now who knew? He was on the verge of sailing and he hoped that he might never see this family of Guthries again. "Yes, Belle was here."

There was a look in the corners of Kenyon's eyes that sent a spasm of fear all through Graham's body. What was this man not capable of doing since he had deliberately turned Peter, his friend, over to a street-walker, having first rendered him senseless? "Then I'm here for Belle, as well," he said to himself, "and whatever you did you'll pay for that too."

There was an empty cardboard collar-box on the floor. Kenyon gave it a spiteful kick. "Yes, Belle and I had,— what shall I call it? — a rather tender parting scene here last night,— quite tender, in fact. All very amusing in the sum total of things, eh? I was peculiarly ready for Peter when he dropped in. And, by the way, how on earth did you find out where he spent the night, learning, I trust, to shake off some of his Quaker notions?"

"She rang me up," said Graham, whose fists were

clenched so tightly that every finger contained a pulse. He was almost ready to hit — almost. He was only waiting for one other proof of this dirty dog's treachery.

"Oh, did she? Found your name and address in Peter's pocket, I suppose. Well, she came along last night at the exact psychological moment. The alacrity with which she took dear old drunken Peter off my hands at the merest hint had a certain amount of pathos about it. *He's* off his immaculate perch now, eh? *He's* left his tuppenny halo on a pretty sordid hat-peg, at last, eh? He'll thank me for having done it for him one of these days, I'll be bound."

Graham went slowly over to him. "Not one of these days," he said with extreme distinctness. "Through me, thank God, to-day — now."

Kenyon darted a quick look at the man who had always caused him a considerable amount of inward laughter, whom he had labelled as a precocious provincial. He saw that his face had gone as white as a stone — that his nostrils were all distended and that his eyes seemed to have become bloodshot. No coward, Kenyon had an inherent detestation of a fracas, especially when he was dressed for the street. He decided to avert a row with a touch of autocratic authority. It had worked before.

"Let there be no vulgar display of pugilism here," he said, sharply. "If you don't like my methods, get out!"

Everything in Graham's nature seemed to have become concentrated in one big ball of desire to hit and

hit, and hit again — to hear the heavy thud of his blows on that man's body — to see him lying squirming and broken on the carpet with a receipt in full upon his face for all that he had done.

"Put up your fist," he said, "or I shall have to hit you cold."

"Curse you, get out!" cried Kenyon, catching Graham one on the mouth before he was ready.

Graham laughed. He needed that. By jove, he needed that. He let out his left. "That's for Peter," he said.

Kenyon staggered. His left eye seemed to fill. With a yell of pain he jumped in and hit wildly.

Graham waited a second chance and got it. "And that's for Belle," he said. And his knuckles bled with the contact of teeth.

Kenyon went in again. Chairs fell over and the table was pushed aside. And all the time that he failed to reach Graham's face he screamed like a horse whose stable is in flames.

But Graham, cold, icy cold, and cooler than he had ever been in his life, played with him. He had never been so much a man in his life. He warded and guarded and waited hoping that he might once more feel the sting of pain that would make his last blow unforgetable — epoch-making.

He got it,— but with Kenyon's foot.

And again Graham laughed,— for joy — for very joy. Now he could hit, and hit honestly.

"You little gentleman!" he said. "You perfect little gentleman — I've paid you for Peter, and for

Belle. Here's my debt, with a hundred per cent. interest and then some."

The blow, hard and firm from the full shoulder, caught Kenyon on the point of the jaw, lifted him off his feet and laid him out full stretch on the broad of his back.

For several moments, breathing hard, Graham stood over him, looking down at the dishevelled, unconscious dandy, with his bad blood all over his face and clothes. His collar had sprung, his beautiful brown tie had gone round under his ear, his shirt cuffs were dabbled with red, one eye was bunged up and his mouth was all swollen.

Then Graham rang the bell, and while waiting tidied himself up in front of the glass in which he now felt that he could look.

The girl came in and gave a shrill cry.

"Just see to that man, please. Cold water at once will be the best thing."

He caught up his hat, went out, shut the door, ran down-stairs, let himself into the street and was out of sight and into a taxicab before the girl had recovered herself.

"Paid in full," he said breathlessly to himself, as he bound up his knuckles —"in full."

XIV

With wide-eyed anxiety, Graham, having driven straight back, waited for the doctor's verdict. The

two young men stood alone in the little sitting-room. With a touch of delicacy, which they were quick to notice, Nellie Pope made no attempt to follow them in.

"Um!" said Dr. Harding. "A very close shave from pneumonia. He can't be moved yet, unless, of course, you'd like me to send for an ambulance. That's up to you."

Graham shook his head. "No," he said. "I don't want that. I think he'd better be — I mean I don't want my father — Oh, well, I dare say you understand."

"Yes," said Dr. Harding, "I'm afraid I do. God knows what the percentage of disaster is from men having soused themselves like that. It seems to me that your brother, who had obviously caught a severe chill, must have set out deliberately to make himself drunk, and mixed everything in sight."

Graham held his peace. But his blood tingled at the knowledge that he had given Kenyon something that he would never forget and which would make it necessary for him to remain in the seclusion of his state-room for some days at least.

The young doctor sat down and wrote a prescription and went on quickly to tell Graham what to do. Finally he rose. "I'll look in again this evening," he said. "You'll be here, won't you? Of course we shall get him all right in a couple of days or so,— that is, right enough to go home,— but ——"

"But what?" asked Graham.

"Well," said Dr. Harding, "I may have to leave the rest of the treatment to your father." He

shook his head several times on his way to the door. He had taken one or two close, examining looks of Nellie Pope.

"Mr. Guthrie, you're wanted."

Graham turned sharply. Nellie Pope, waiting until the doctor had gone, put her head in at the door. "Come on in," she said. "Come on in!"

Graham followed her into the bedroom and bent over Peter. Opening his eyes with some difficulty, as though they hurt him, Peter looked about. The room was strange. The face of the girl was strange. The whole thing seemed to belong to a dream. Then he recognized his brother. "You got away, then," he said.

"Got away?"

"Yes. By Jove, what a blaze! The last time I saw you, you were carrying mother along the passage. I could hardly see you for smoke. I got Betty out into the street and dived back into the house. Father was the only one left. Good God, what awful flames! The library was red hot. I got into the middle of it, choking and yelling for father, when something fell on my head. Is he — dead?"

"No," said Graham. "He's all right."

A little smile broke out on Peter's face and he sighed and turned over and went to sleep again.

Nellie Pope made a comical grimace. "I don't wonder that 'e's been dreaming about a fire," she whispered. She arranged the covers over Peter's shoulder with a deft and sympathetic hand, and then took Graham's arm and led him out into the passage.

"You've got your work. Push off. I'll see to the medicine when it comes. Don't you worry. Get back as soon as you can, and while you're away I'll look after 'im like a sister. I like 'im, poor boy! My goodness! why don't somebody put the lid on all the distilleries? Half the troubles in the world 'ud be prevented that way!"

Very reluctantly Graham acted on the girl's suggestion that he should return to his office. He was in the middle of very important work. He held out his hand. "You're a damned good little sort," he said, "and I'm intensely grateful."

Nellie Pope's eyes filled with tears. It had been a long time since she had been treated so humanly or had her hand so warmly clasped. But she screwed out a laugh and waved her hand to Graham as he let himself out.

She spent the rest of the day in and out of the bedroom. With her eyes continually on her clock, she devoted herself untiringly and with the utmost efficiency to looking after her patient. To the very instant she gave him his medicine and said cheery, pleasant things to him every time she had to wake him up to administer it. It was an odd and wonderful day for her, as well as for Peter,— filled with many touches of curious comedy, the comedy of life — and many moments of queer pathos. Once she had to listen to a little outburst of incoherent love, when Peter insisted on telling her what an angel Betty was. Once she was obliged to hear what Peter had to say about his father, from which she gathered that this man was responsible

for the burning house from which this boy had only just been able to escape alive, having saved his family. The obsession of fire remained with Peter until the evening, when he woke up with a clear brain, and having taken his medicine, looked at her with new eyes.

"What's all this?" he asked quietly. "Where am I, and who are you?"

"Oh, that's all right," said Nellie Pope.

"Is it? Are you a nurse?"

"Yes," she said.

"Is this a hospital?"

"Yes,— that is, a nursing home," she said.

"Oh!" said Peter. "Where's Kenyon?"

"I don't know, dearie."

"What on earth was that filth that he gave me to drink? I carried the books into his room, and then I'm hanged if I can remember — I've got a most frightful headache. Every time I move my head seems to split in half. How long have I been here? Was I poisoned, or what?"

"Now don't you talk or you'll get me into trouble. You go off to sleep like a good boy. You'll be all right in the morning."

"Shall I? That's good." And he heaved a big sigh and obeyed. It was extraordinary how sleep came to his rescue.

He was still asleep when Graham came back at six o'clock. Nellie Pope opened the door to him. "'E's getting on fine," she said. "You can take that line out of your forehead. 'E's been talking quite sensibly

to me. What I don't know about your father and your family isn't worth knowing."

Graham tiptoed into the bedroom, drew a chair up to the side of the bed and sat down. And while he waited for the time to arrive for Peter's next dose many strange things ran through his brain,— his own precocity — his own desire to be smart and become a man of the world — his own evening in the little shabby theatrical lodgings in Oxford with Kenyon — his dealings with Ita Strabosck — the night he had spent in his bed-room when Peter took his razors away — that awful hour when he sneaked into his father's laboratory and under the pressure of great trouble forged his name. The only thing that gave him any sense of pleasure out of all this was the fact that he carried in his pocket a warm and spontaneous letter from Ranken Townsend, which he knew would be better to Peter than pints of medicine.

And while he sat watching, Nellie Pope ate her sausage in the kitchen and finished the instalment of the love story in her magazine.

What a world, O my masters!

XV

It was late when Graham let himself into his father's house that night. He had done many things that day. He had also been through much anxiety. He felt that he deserved the right to turn in at once and sleep the sleep of the just. But Kenyon had said

that Belle had been alone in his rooms the night before and the queer expression that had come into his eyes as he made the remark lived most uneasily in Graham's memory. He now knew Nicholas Kenyon to be a skunk — an unscrupulous individualist devoid of loyalty, incapable of feeling true friendship and in every way unfit to have any dealings, unwatched, with a girl unless she was in his own set or belonged to the same class as the two chorus girls for whom he had waited outide the stage door of the Oxford Theatre.

He was well aware of the fact that Belle had been something more than merely attracted by Kenyon. He had even hoped that she might be engaged to be married to him, being very proud to believe that some day soon she might become the wife of the man under whose spell he, like all the rest of the family, had fallen. Now, however, in the light of Kenyon's hideous treatment of Peter, he saw his one-time hero with eyes from which all the glamour of his appearance had disappeared and he was filled with an overwhelming desire to see Belle at once and make it clear to her, bluntly and finally, that she must clear Kenyon out of her mind as a house is rid of vermin. Belle was, as he well knew, a high-spirited, amazingly imperious, independent girl, with strong emotions. She was not one who would be turned lightly, or even driven, out of a line of thought. She was, on the contrary, as difficult to treat as an unbroken filly and could only be managed with the lightest of hands. If she really and truly loved Kenyon and still believed in him, he

knew that he could not say anything that would prejudice him in her estimation, even by telling her what he had done to Peter. She would be able to produce reasons, however far-fetched, to make that incident seem less ugly. There was, however, the chance — just the chance — that she would be open to conviction. After much inward argument and hesitation he decided to go up to Belle's room, and if she were not asleep, to have a little talk with her and find out how the land lay, and if he could see any possibility of adding to his punishment of Kenyon to do so by putting him in his true colour before Belle.

It took him some time to come to this decision and screw up his courage to face Belle. For nearly an hour he paced up and down the quiet library, smoking cigarette after cigarette. Belle was likely to tell him to go and hang himself if she considered that he was butting into her private affairs. He knew this,— no one better. He had often done so before. He decided, however, to run this risk and, in the hope that she might still be up, went upstairs and stood for a moment listening outside her door. He could hear no sound in her room, no movement, no creak of a drawer being opened or shut. He knocked softly and waited,— was just going to knock again when the door was opened.

With her beautiful black hair done for the night and a pink kimono over her night-dress, Belle stood in the doorway with an expression of surprised inquiry in her eyes. These two had not taken the trouble to be very good friends for some years.

"Oh, it's you, Graham," she said, but made no move.

"It's awfully late, I know; but, if you're not too tired, may I come in?" Graham hated himself for being self-conscious. It seemed absurd with his own sister. He wished then that he had not been quite so selfish and self-contained since he had considered himself to be a man, and had gone out of his way to keep up his old boyish relations with Belle.

He was a little surprised when she said, "Come in, dear," and made way for him. He noticed quickly as soon as she stood under the light that her eyes were red and swollen, and that there was a most unusual air about her of gentleness and dejection. He noticed, too, with immense relief, that a large photograph of Kenyon in hunting-kit which he had seen standing on her dressing-table had been taken away. A good sign!

The room was very different from Ethel's. It had nothing of that rather anæmic ultra-modern air so carefully cultivated by the younger girl. On the contrary, everything in it was characteristic of Belle. It was full of ripe colours and solid comfort. A mass of silver things jostled each other untidily on the dressing-table. A collection of monthly fashion papers with vivid decorative covers lay on a heap on a chair, and a novel, open in the middle, had been flung, face down, on the sofa. There was no attempt at carefully shaded lights. They were all turned on and were reflected from the long glasses in a large mahogany wardrobe. The carpet all round the dressing-table was bespattered with white powder.

"I was reading when I heard your knock," she said,—"at least I was pretending to read. Sleep was miles away."

Graham sat down, hanging a pair of stockings over the arm of the chair. "Why?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't know, I've been thinking,—for a change. It's such a new thing for me that it knocked sleep out of my head. Not nice thoughts, either."

She seemed glad to talk, Graham thought. "Anything the matter, Bee?" he asked.

"I guess it's nearly a century since you called me Bee," she said with a queer little laugh. "Would you say that anything was the matter if you had just picked yourself out of the ruins of a house that had fallen about your ears?"

Graham got up suddenly, sat on the sofa at Belle's side and put his arms round her shoulder. "Don't dodge behind phrases, old girl," he said. "Just tell me in plain English. Let me help you if I can."

But Belle shook him off,—not angry with him so much as with herself. She detested weakness. This unexpected kindness on Graham's part made her feel like crying again. In her heart she longed for some one to whom she could pour out her soul, and Graham's affection almost caught her before she could stop herself. Not to him, she told herself, nor to any member of her family, was she going to confess the sort of thoughts that had choked her brain ever since that hour alone with Kenyon. Not even to Betty, to whom she told most things, was she going to lay bare the fact that, in the cold light of day, she found herself

deeply hurt and deeply humiliated at Kenyon's treatment of her. In fact, she had herself only that night begun to realize the state of her feelings and was still suffering under the discovery.

Graham, whose nature and character were as much like those of Belle as though they were twins, caught her mental attitude as she stood struggling between pride and a desire to tell the truth. It was as plain to him as though she had already confessed that Kenyon had done something which had shaken her belief in him. His photograph, which had dominated her room, had been put away. Her eyes were red and swollen. All his sympathy was stirred. At the same time he rejoiced in the eager thought that he had it in his power to clear Kenyon finally out of her mind.

He set to work quietly. "I'm going to tell you about Peter," he said.

She turned quickly. "Peter? There's nothing wrong with Peter, is there?"

"God knows how much wrong there is. I'm going to tell you all I know. We're all in this,— through Kenyon, and because we've been thoughtless fools running amuck through life."

The idea of there being anything wrong with Peter brought Belle quickly out of self-analysis and the self-indulgence of her own pain. "Don't beat about the bush," she said. "Please tell me. You told mother this morning that he had stayed with Nicholas last night."

"That was a lie. This is what happened. After

a rotten day worrying about an upset with Betty, he went to see Kenyon late last night. He'd had nothing to eat. I believe because Kenyon had been disappointed about something earlier in the evening,— but I only make a guess at that from the way he looked when I saw him to-day,— he deliberately took it out on Peter."

"On Peter? How?" Belle understood this disappointment only too well.

"He made him drunk."

"Drunk! — Peter!"

"Dead drunk,— by doping him with a fearful mixture of all the drinks he had. He had always threatened to do it, and this time he caught Peter napping. That was a foul enough thing to do anyway, but it didn't satisfy him. He got him into the street and instead of putting him into a cab and sending him home he called a passing woman ——"

"Oh, no!" cried Belle.

"Yes,— and gave Peter over to her and there he's been, in her bed, in a little hole of an apartment, ill and poisoned, ever since."

"Oh, my God!" cried Belle.

"The woman rang me up early this morning and I got Ralph Harding to go and see what he could do. I've been there most of the day,— except for ten minutes with Kenyon — the best ten minutes I ever put in — ever."

He got up and stood looking at Belle with a gleam of such intense satisfaction in his eyes that she guessed what he had done.

"That's our admirable friend Kenyon," he added. "That's the man who shared rooms with Peter — whose charm of manner got us all at Oxford, and who was made one of the family by father and mother when he came to this country. I hit him for Peter, for you and for myself in that glorious ten minutes to-day. I left him lying on the floor in his rooms all over his own black blood, and if ever I meet him again, in any part of the world, at any time of my life, I'll give him another dose of the same sort — for Peter, for you and for me — That's what I came to tell you, Bee."

He bent forward and kissed her, turned round and left the room.

That was Kenyon, Graham had said.

Standing where he had left her, with this story of utter and incredible treachery in her ears, Belle added another count to Graham's indictment,— that of trying to seduce her without even the promise of marriage, when her grief at parting with him made her weak.

For a moment she stood chilled and stunned. That was Kenyon — All along she had been fooled — all along he had been playing with her as though she amounted merely to a light creature with whom men passed the time. It was due to her father,— of all men, her father,— that she stood there that night, humiliated but unharmed, with her pride all slashed and bleeding, her self-respect at a discount, but with nothing on her conscience that would make her face the passing days with fear and horror.

She suddenly flamed into action. "Yes; that's Kenyon!" she thought, and making a sort of blazing pounce on the middle drawer of her dressing-table she pulled it open, took out the large photograph of a man in hunting-kit, and with queer, choking cries of rage and scorn, tore it into shreds and stamped upon the pieces.

XVI

Belle got very little sleep that night. Having finally decided, on top of her talk with Graham, that Kenyon had intended to treat her much in the same way as he had treated Peter, she endeavored to look back honestly and squarely at the whole time during which that super-individualist had occupied her thoughts. She saw herself as a very foolish, naïve girl, without balance, without reserve and without the necessary caution in her treatment of men which should come from proper training and proper advice.

She laid no blame upon her mother,— that excellent little woman whose God-sent optimism made her believe that all her children were without flaw and that the world was full of people with good hearts and good intentions. She blamed only herself, and saw plainly enough that she had allowed her head to be turned by her father's sudden acquisition of wealth which made it unnecessary for her to be anything more than a sort of butterfly skimming lightly through life without any duties to perform — without any work

to occupy her attention — without any hobbies to fill her mind and give her ambition. She felt like some one who had just escaped from being run over in the streets, or who, by some divine accident, had been turned back from the very edge of an abyss. It was indeed a night that she could never forget in all her life. She lay in bed in the dark room with her eyes wide open, hearing all the hours strike one by one, watching herself with a sort of terror and amazement passing through Oxford. All the incidents that had been crowded into that short and what had appeared to be glorious week, came up in front of her again, especially the incident in the back-water with Kenyon and the night of the ball at Wadham College. These were followed in her mind by the scene in the library in her father's house, and finally that dangerous hour in Kenyon's rooms when, but for the intervention of that man who seemed of so little account, she might have been placed among those unfortunate girls of whom the world talks very harshly and who pay a terrible price for their foolishness and ignorance. And when finally she got up, tired-eyed but saner than she had been since those good, strenuous days of hers at her college when she had intended to make art her mission in life, she told herself with a characteristic touch of humour that the reformed criminal was a very good hand at preaching, and made up her mind to go along to Ethel and improve the occasion. It was very obvious to her that if she did not do this nobody would, and she was eager to give a sort of proof of the fact that she was grateful for her own escape by giving

her young sister the benefit of her suffering. And so she put on her dressing-gown and went to her sister's room — the little sister of whom she was so fond and proud.

Ethel was sitting at her dressing-table doing her hair. There was a petulant and discontented expression on her face. Still shamming illness, she had not yet recovered from the smart of what she called Jack's impertinence. There was a surprise in store for her, — she who believed that she had managed so successfully to play the ostrich.

"Why, Belle!" she said. "What's the matter? You look as though you had been in a railway accident."

Belle sat down, not quite sure how she would begin or of the sort of reception that she would receive. She always felt rather uncouth in the presence of this calm, self-assured, highly finished little sister of hers. "Well," she said, "I have been through a sort of railway accident and a good many of my bones seem to have been broken,— that's why I'm here. I want to stop you, if I can, from going into the same train."

"I don't think I quite understand you."

"I don't suppose you do, my dear, but you shall — believe me." And then, in the plainest English she gave Ethel the story of her relations with Kenyon, without in any way sparing herself. And when she came to the parting scene in Kenyon's rooms she painted a picture that was so strong and vivid — so appalling in its proof of foolishness, that she made even

Ethel forget her complacency and sit with large, frightened eyes.

Then she got up and began to walk about. "I'm not a fool," she said, "and this thing is going to teach me something. Also, I'm not a coward and I've told you all this for a reason. You think that you're a very wise little person, kiddie, but in reality you're no better than I am, and just as sentimental and every bit as unwatched and as resentful of guidance. Why are you here instead of being at school? You think no one knows that. Well, I do. You're playing ducks and drakes with mother and father and your education in order to have what we call a 'good time.' You have shammed sickness so that you could have an adventure with the boy next door."

"How d'you know that?" cried Ethel.

"Easily enough, my dear. I was told by the girl who used to bring your thermos up to this room and who had caught you with the boy. Two days ago she left to be married, but before she went she blurted out the whole story. It wasn't for me to interfere then. I didn't much care, to tell the truth,—in fact, I thought it was rather a good joke. I rather admired you for the cunning way in which you had arranged everything. I thought you were a good sport. I don't know how far it has gone, but I hope to Heaven that you've not been quite so insane as I was. I'm not going to tell mother or do the elder sister stunt, or anything of that sort. I'm just going to ask you to chuck it all and go back to school and play the game for a change, and to try to bear in mind that you owe

father and mother something,— a thing we all seem to have forgotten,— and when you do go back, just remember — and always remember — what I've told you about myself. We're very much alone, you and I,— like two girls who are staying in a house with somebody else's father and mother,— and so let's help each other and get a little honesty and self-respect and see things straight. What d'you say, dear little sister?"

Ethel got up, and with a complete breakdown of all the artificiality so carefully instilled into her by her fashionable school, slipped into her sister's arms and burst out crying.

XVII

It was not until the next afternoon that Peter was allowed to get up. His superb constitution had stood, rock-like, against the chill which the doctor's medicine had helped to throw off. He had done full justice to a broiled chicken which Nellie Pope had cooked for him; but when, having put on his clothes, he stood in front of the looking-glass, he felt as though he had been under a steam-roller and flattened out.

"Good Lord!" he said, when he saw his pale, unshaven face. "Good Lord!" But he was very happy. He had read and re-read Ranken Townsend's generous apology. Betty was waiting for him — thank God for that.

And then he began to look round. Was this a nursing home? The dressing-table, with its tins of

powder and a large dilapidated puff, its red stuff for lips, its shabby little brushes and a comb with several of its teeth gone, looked as though it belonged to a woman,— poor and struggling. The door of the closet, which gaped a little, showed dresses hanging and a pair of very high-heeled boots with white uppers. He opened a drawer in the dressing-table. It was full of soiled white gloves, several veils neatly rolled up, and a collection of small handkerchiefs. A strong, pungent scent rose up from them.

An ugly suspicion crept slowly into his mind. He looked at the bed with its frilled pillows, at the flower papered bare walls, at the rather worn blue carpet, at the flimsy wrap hanging limply on a peg on the door of the bath-room, at the little bed-room slippers tucked away beneath one of the white, painted chairs ——

He turned and called out: "Nurse! Nurse!"

Something in his tone brought Nellie Pope in quickly.

He was standing with his hand on the big brass knob of the bed. "You told me that this was a nursing home," he said.

The girl laughed. How should she know what Peter had done with his life — of the ideal that he kept so steadily in front of him? She only knew the other kind of men. "So it is," she said. "It's *my* home and I've had to be your nurse. Pretty well put, I think. Don't you? 'Ow d'you feel, dearie? A bit groggy on your pins?"

The girl's cockney accent, her made-up face, her cheap, smart clothes were noticed by him for the first time. Her insinuating, cheerful manner and that

sort of hail-fellow-well-met intimacy that was all about her, came to him with a new and appalling meaning. He had been spoken to by just such women in London after dark, and on Broadway and its side streets as he passed. They belonged to the night life of all great cities. They were the moths who came out attracted by the glare of electric light. Good God! What was he doing in that place?

The keen remembrance of this woman's inestimable kindness, the supreme lack of selfishness which had inspired her to bend so frequently over his bed, the charity of her treatment of him as he lay ill and helpless, made him anxious above everything else not to hurt her feelings. But there were things that he must know at once,— urgent, vital things which might affect all the rest of his life. There was Betty his love-girl — the girl who was to be his wife — who was waiting for him with the most exquisite and whole-hearted trust ——

"I want you to tell me how I came here," he said.

Nellie Pope went over to the dressing-table. "That's easy," she replied lightly, adding a new coat of color to her lips. "The night before last, not having 'ad any luck, I was 'aving a last look round and 'appened to be in Forty-eighth Street just as you staggered out of a 'ouse on the arm of a young gent. I reckoned 'e didn't 'ave any use for me, being outside 'is own place, but I passed 'im the usual greetin' from force of 'abit, just as 'e 'ad called up a taxi. With a funny look on 'is face,— a curly smile I called it to meself,—'e suddenly gave me orders, lumped you into

the cab, blind to the wide, and told me to get in and take you 'ome, and 'elp meself to any money you 'ad on you. Well, I did, and the next instalment of the serial you know as well as I do. Feeling weak, old dear?"

Peter sat heavily on the foot of the bed.

Nellie Pope went on,— simply and naturally, like one who is glad to talk, glad to hear her own voice, indescribably, pathetically glad to be in the company of a man who asked for nothing, who was not a guest, but a friend — a fellow-creature down on his luck. "Me and Graham," she said,—"and, I say, what a good-looking boy that is, and fairly devoted to you, dearie,— well, 'im and me think that you must 'ave done something to get the goat of this young feller. 'E doped you, that's certain, and then passed you off on me. Enjoyed the joke, as it were, too, according to what I noticed. Is that likely?"

Peter didn't answer. The joke —? Back into his mind came the many things that Kenyon had said to him at Oxford: "You need humanizing, old boy. You want to be hauled off that self-made pedestal of yours. One of these days you'll come to an unholy crash —" Back into his mind also came Kenyon's taunts made to him as he stood with his back to the fireplace in the library the night after they had returned from having seen Ita Strabosck: "You're blind! Blind! I tell you, and in that room sits a man whose patients you may become."

Utterly ignorant of the feeling of revenge which had surged through Kenyon's brain after Belle had

been saved by the Doctor, it was borne in on Peter, as he sat on the bed of this poor little night-bird, that Kenyon had set out on purpose — with calculated deliberation — to make him human, as he called it, before he returned to England. He had made him drunk in order to carry out the joke. He had given him something to render him insensible, well knowing that in no other way could this fiendish desire be fulfilled.

"What time is my brother coming?" he asked.

Nellie Pope was busy daubing powder on her face. "Not until about nine o'clock," she said. "'E and me talked it over this morning. The idea is that you're coming in on the train that arrives at the Grand Central at eight-forty-five. Now don't forget this. You stayed the night in your friend's apartment, but you couldn't see 'im off the next morning because you'd taken on a bit of business for 'im which meant going out of town. Your brother is going to meet you at the station. That's the story. And you're going 'ome together. 'E went back to get one of your bags. 'E will sneak it out of the 'ouse and bring it round here. Oh, I think we're pretty good stage managers, 'im and me. You see, the notion is that Ma mustn't be upset. Poor little Ma!"

"What's to-day?" asked Peter, whose whole body seemed suddenly to have been frozen.

"Sunday, dearie."

"Then I've been here two nights?"

"That's so," said the girl.

Peter was consumed with a desire to explore the apartment. He wanted to discover whether there was

another bedroom. "Are you comfortable here?" he asked, a little clumsily.

Nellie Pope was rather flattered at his interest and so genuinely delighted to see this great big man-boy on his feet again that she could have broken into a dance. "Come and 'ave a look at my suite," she said, laughing at the word she chose. "You know the bedroom,— I don't think you'll forget that in a 'urry. On the right I 'ave the sitting-room which I only use for my customers, preferring to sit in the kitchen, which we now come to." She led him into it, with her hand on his arm — she was apeing the manner and the phraseology of the guide. "In this bright little apartment, beautifully furnished with a gas stove and dresser — not exactly Jacobean — a plain, but serviceable Deal table and a nice piece of linoleum which 'as worn very well, the sometimes popular Miss Nellie Pope passes most of 'er leisure. 'Ere she cooks her own meals and washes up after 'erself,— she's a very neat little thing,— and before going out on the long trail in all weathers, reads about life with a big L in the magazines, in which 'eroes with curly 'air, who stand about six-feet-six, make 'onest love to blondes with 'eads like birds' nests, who are nearly always about six-feet-one, and never fail to wear silk stockings,— and there you 'ave it. A charming suite for a single lady who earns 'er own living. The only drawback to it is that the rent 'as to be paid monthly in advance, and the blighter who collects it gives no grace. This is the sort of thing: 'Say! Got that rent?' 'Well —' 'Come on now,

ain't got no time to waste here. Pay up or get out—' I tell you what it is, dearie, there's a little Florida in Hell for them men who let out apartments to us girls, and the heat there is something intense." She laughed, but there was a curious quiver to it.

Behind all her badinage and cheery pluck Peter could see a vein of terror which touched his sympathies. Poor little painted, unfortunate thing! Was there no other way in which she could live and keep her head above water? He sat down and leaned on the table with his elbows. "Will you tell me," he said, "what brought you to this?"

"Brought me to it?" Nellie Pope shot out a laugh. "You dear, funny old thing!" she said. "Nothing brought me it. I chose it."

"Chose it! Chose *this?*"

"Yes, this! A great many of us choose it. It's the easiest way. That shocks yer, doesn't it,—you who come from a comfortable home and whose sisters 'ave everything they want. But, you listen to this and don't be too fast to pass judgment. I was one of a big brood of unnecessary kids. My father earned fourteen shillings a week by grubbing in the earth from daybreak till sundown and my mother took in washing. We lived perched up on a 'ill among a dozen dirty little cottages. What was the outlook for me? Being dragged up with meat once a week and as a maid-of-all-work down in the town, being ordered about by a drab of a tradesman's wife, with not enough wages to buy a new 'at and a little bit of finery for Sundays, and then be married to a lout who

got drunk regularly every Saturday night and made me what mother was,— a dragged, anæmic, dull animal woman, working up to the time I 'ad a baby and working directly afterwards,— no colour, no lights, no rush and bustle, no decent clothes to put on, no independence. Yes, I chose it, and if I 'ad my time over again I should choose it again. See! It's the easiest way. Oh, yes, we die young and nobody knows where we're buried, but we've 'ad our day, and it's the day that every woman fights for, the same as every man. Oh, by the way, 'ere's your purse!" She pushed it over to Peter.

"My purse?" he said.

"Yes; don't you recognize it? It hasn't got so much in it as it 'ad, because I was told to 'elp meself, and I did. I 'ave jotted down what I 'ave taken; 'ere's the account." She held out a piece of paper on which Peter could see a list of spendings, which included a taxicab fare and a nickel for telephoning. At the end of it there was an item entitled "Fee, thirty dollars."

Peter shuddered. He pushed the remainder of the money back to her across the table. "Please keep it," he said.

Nellie Pope laughed again. She was full of laughter. "I hoped you'd say that," she said. "It'll come in mighty useful."

Peter felt in his pocket and took out his chequebook. He looked about and saw a bottle of ink and a pen on the dresser, with a piece of dilapidated blue blotting-paper. Watched with peculiar interest and excitement by Nellie Pope, he got up, went over to the

dresser and wrote a cheque. "Will you accept this?" he asked. "I wish I could make it larger. But if it was ten times the amount it couldn't possibly cover my gratitude to you. You've been awfully kind to me. Thank you, Nellie." He held it out.

The girl took it and gave a little cry. "Five hundred dollars! Oh, Gawd! I didn't know that there was so much money in the world." She burst into tears, but went on talking. "Mostly I can't afford to cry, because it washes the paint off my face, and it's very expensive. But what do I care, with this blooming cheque in my 'and? I shall be able to take a little 'oliday from business and, my word, that's a treat. God makes one or two gentlemen from time to time, 'pon my soul he does. Put it there, Peter." She held out her hand with immense cordiality and gratitude, and Peter took it warmly.

But he had discovered what he wanted to know. There was only one bed in that apartment, and back into his mind came Kenyon's words. "Blind! Blind! — both of you — and in that room sits a man whose patients you may become."

XVIII

Graham was before his time. He hurried in, as anxious to get Peter out of that apartment as Peter was to go. He found his brother sitting on one side of the kitchen table and Nellie Pope on the other. Both had magazines. The girl tore herself out of the mar-

ble house of the heroine's father with reluctance. Peter had been holding his magazine upside down for an hour. He had been looking right through it and into his father's laboratory. There was not even the remote suggestion of a smile on his pale face when Graham threw open the door.

"Come on, old man," urged Graham. "The taxi's waiting."

Peter got up. "Well, good-bye, Nellie," he said. "I'll come and see you soon."

The girl darted a quick look at him. She saw that she was mistaken. "Oh, yes, that'll be very kind of you. I 'aven't got any friends."

"Yes you have," said Graham,—"two."

Nellie Pope led the way into the narrow passage, stood on tiptoe, made a long arm and got Peter's hat off the peg. Then she stood in front of him and her lips trembled, although her well-practised smile curled up the corners of her mouth. "Not good-bye, but orevoy, eh? Well, good luck and God bless you. I shall miss you both most awfully. It's been a fair treat to 'ave you 'ere."

Peter waved his hand and went down the bare stairs. His knees felt weak and shaky and his eyes seemed to be at the back of his head. He drew back to let a woman pass. She cocked her golden head at him with an enquiring eye and a flash of teeth and pushed open the half-closed door of an apartment. Her high-pitched metallic voice rang out. "Say, Kid, there goes Nellie Pope's boarder. By Gosh, don't yer think some one oughter stop her?"

The two boys drove home in silence. They had both caught the meaning of those significant words.

Graham, the self-imagined man of the world, who had picked up a large collection of half-facts — as all the precocious do — but who, for all that, or in spite of that, had walked into the trap set by Ita Strabosck without the faintest perception of his danger, threw those words aside. Everything would be right, he told himself, and if *he* had been coming out of Nellie Pope's apartment in the ordinary way and had overheard her rival's loud comment, he would simply have shrugged his shoulders, like the rest of the young men of his type and spirit, and knowing only the tail end of the truth, told himself that all men take "chances" and that the odds were largely in his favor. And what would this attitude of puerile bravado have proved? That he and all the men like him were just as much a menace to society from knowing the half-facts which did nothing more for them than allow them to take "chances," as the men who were wholly ignorant and so blundered blindly into tragedy.

To Peter, the words of the painted woman came as a finishing blow. In his crass and culpable ignorance, into which Kenyon had flung one most terrific fact, he came away from Nellie Pope not knowing whether he was immune — not able to assure himself that he was safe. Think of it! Big and strong as he was, he remained a mere child in the matter of plain, necessary and urgent truths, and if ever a man knew himself for a fool he was Peter Guthrie, as he drove home.

No less grateful to God than ever for having been

assisted to go through Harvard and Oxford clean and straight, he cursed himself for not having sought out the facts of life,— not from grinning and salacious arguments of half-informed young men, but from a proper source,— since his father had not conceived it to be his duty to give them to him early in his life. If Kenyon had not opened out a new and awful vista of thought the night that he talked about Graham and Ita Strabosck, Peter's ignorance, so jealously and mistakenly preserved, would have remained so colossal that he would have gone home humiliated, but unworried. As it was, this one thing at any rate — this one most awful thing — had sunk into his mind, making him dangerously less ignorant but without proper knowledge. He arrived home a prey, therefore, to the most hideous fear.

Luckily there were people dining with his father and mother. Belle had gone out of town for several days, suffering from the shock of finding out the truth about Kenyon, and Ethel had returned to school. Peter was able to go up to his own room unnoticed.

Graham, whose loyalty and concern had been good to see, went up with him and threw the suit-case into a corner.

"Gee!" he said, with a touch of emotion that he made no attempt to hide, "but I'm glad you're home, Petey." It was many years since he had called Peter by the name that he had gone by in the nursery. He seemed to have come so close to his big brother during those recent hours.

Peter did a surprising thing. He turned quickly,

strode over to Graham, put his arm round his shoulder and kissed his cheek. For just those few moments both men had gone back through the years and were little boys again.

Two things happened to Graham. He blushed to the roots of his hair, and swallowed something that threatened to choke him.

"You said you had something on, didn't you,—supper, or something?" said Peter.

"Yes; but I'll cut it out if you want me to."

"No, don't. Why should you? I feel pretty rotten and I shall turn in right away. Don't bother about me any more, old man."

"I'd rather stay with you."

"Yes, I know you would, old boy, but you push off and have a good time. As a matter of fact, I rather want to — to be alone for a bit. D'you see?"

"All right, then." And to show that he had become a man again and his own master, Graham went off whistling the latest tango.

And by letting his brother go at that moment, Peter did a very unwise thing. He was still weak and ill. His brain, which had not recovered itself from the effects of Kenyon's poisonous mixture, was in no condition to be tortured by solitary thought. He needed to be kept away from self-analysis — to be set to work on the ordinary commonplaces of everyday life. Most of all, his thoughts required to be put to rest by sleep.

Left to himself, Peter sat down, almost in the dark, with his arms folded, his legs stuck out and his chin buried in his chest, and thrashed the tired machinery

of his brain into action. All that had happened in the last forty-eight hours coming on top of the suffering that he had undergone through having been separated from Betty and having failed to bring about the new relationship with his father, upon which he had set his heart, gradually became distorted. He began to look at everything through an enormous magnifying glass and to see himself, not as one whose loyal, simple and unsuspicious nature had been taken advantage of by Kenyon, but as a common drunken creature who had had to be lifted into a cab and who had spent two nights in the apartment of a woman of the street. He began to look at himself with so deep a humiliation and disgust that the mere thought of his ever again holding Betty in his arms seemed outrageous. And having by stages, made conceivable by the condition of his health and the strain that had been put upon him by all the things that had happened since his return from England, come up to this morbid and hyperconscientious point in his self-condemnation, he stood up suddenly, obsessed by a new and appalling thought. He said to himself: "I'm not only unworthy of Betty, I'm unclean, and so unfit to live." And having seized at that with the avidity and even triumph that comes with a sudden disorder of the understanding, he began to dramatize his death — to ask himself how to make it most effective. And then his father entered his thoughts. "Ah!" he cried inwardly. "Father — it's *father* who is responsible — it's *father* who must be made to pay! I'm his eldest son. He's very proud of me. He shall come into the

room to-night in which he spends all his time for the benefit of other men's sons and find the one he neglected lying dead on the floor. That's it! Now I've got it! There's a hideous irony about this that'll sink even into his curious mind. I'd like to be able to see his face when he finds me. There'd be just a little satisfaction in that."

If only Graham could have come back at that moment, or the little mother to put her arms round that poor, big, over-sensitive, uninitiated lad and bring him out of his mental dejection with her love and warmth!

There was a revolver somewhere among his things. He had bought it when he went camping during one of his vacations from Harvard. He hadn't seen it for several years. With feverish haste he instituted a search, going through one drawer after another, flinging his collars and socks and all his personal things aside, talking in a half-whisper to himself, until, with a little cry of glee, he found it with a box of cartridges. And then, with the most scrupulous care he loaded it, slipped it into his pocket and crept out of the room and downstairs. The door of the drawing-room was ajar. He heard laughter and the intermingling of voices, heard some one say "Good-bye." He dodged quickly past, through the library and into the room in which he had last stood with his hand on the shaking shoulders of his father. *He* would give him something to weep about this time,— yes, by jove, he would! *He* would make him wake up at last to the fact that his sons were human beings and needed to be treated as such!

He welcomed the fact that away in the distance a storm had broken with the deep artillery of thunder, and that already heavy rain was swishing down on the city. It fitted into his half-maddened mood.

He shut the door. He walked quickly about the room, speculating as to the most effective place to be found outstretched. He had a decision and then, so that there might be no loop-hole for his father, sat down to write a final indictment.

Time fled away. He covered page after page of note paper, pouring out all his soul, making a great appeal for the right treatment of Graham and his sisters, and finally signed his name, having scrawled in his large round writing, "This is my protest."

The storm had come nearer. Outbursts of thunder rolled over the house followed by stabs of lightning.

He then deliberately placed himself on the chosen spot, cocked the trigger and put the cold barrel of the revolver to his temple.

There was a sort of scream.

Peter swung round, with his nerves jangling like a wire struck suddenly with a stick.

There stood his father, unable to form a sentence, his face grey, his eyes distended and his arms thrown out in front of him.

XIX

Peter was angry, like a child disturbed just at the moment when he was planning a surprise.

"Why couldn't you have come in five minutes later?" he cried out, with queer petulance.

The Doctor tottered forward and peered into his son's face. "Why were you going to do that? Tell me, tell me!"

"You'd have found it all there," said Peter, pointing to the pages which he had left on the desk. "Not very nice reading, I can assure you. But if you want me to tell you instead, I will. And then you can see how a man dies, instead of finding him dead. Perhaps this is the best way, after all."

He went to the door and locked it, still holding the revolver. The sight of his father did not stir any pity or sympathy in his heart. On the contrary, it added to the fever that had attacked his brain and acted as an irritant. He went back and stood in front of the grey man. There was an expression of contempt on his altered face. The pattering of heavy rain against the windows seemed to please him. Nature, like himself, seemed to have burst into open protest.

"Sit down," he said.

The Doctor obeyed. The blaze in his son's eyes contradicted his unnatural calmness. He had to deal with temporary madness. He could see that, and he was chilled with a sense of impending danger in which the most poignant solicitude was mixed.

"Now," said Peter, weighing his words with odd deliberation, "you're going to hear something that'll shake you out of your smug self-complacency and your pitiful belief that everything is all right in this house — You're a good man, a better man than the average

father. There's nothing in your life that isn't to your credit. Even since you had children you've worked like a dog to give them a better education than you had, and you've gone without things to provide us with money and make things easy. We all know that and we're grateful. We all know that we ought to be proud of you as a doctor — as a man who has made discoveries and added to the scientific knowledge of your profession. Well, we *are* proud of you. But in the last words that you'll hear me speak I'm going to tell you what you've failed to do and why, in spite of all your kindness and unselfishness, not one of your children respects you or loves you, and why I, your eldest son, have got to put an end to myself because of your neglect."

Dr. Guthrie sprang to his feet. The calculated cruelty of this indictment was more than he could endure. "What does this mean? If you don't respect and love me, the others do. In what way have I neglected you?" He stood up to Peter like a man, whipped into sudden anger.

Peter liked that. It meant that he could hit out and put facts into naked words without feeling that he was ill-treating a weakling. "That's what I'm going to tell you," he said. "But there's lots of time and I'm not going to leave anything out. What makes you think the others respect and love you? Do they ever tell you so? Do they ever tell you anything? Do they ever go out of their way to come in here for a little talk? And if they did come in would you get out of your shell far enough for them to see that you're

a human being? Would you meet them half-way in their desire to get something besides your money from you? Have you ever once in your life been sufficiently inspired with a sense of your responsibility as to make you get up and leave your work and come among us to play with our toys and get known? Have you ever once in all the years that we've been growing up been courageous or wise enough to take Graham or me for a walk and tell us *any one* thing that we ought to know? In what way have you ever neglected us? In the most vital way of all. We could have done without your money and the education that you've been so delighted to give us. We could have done without comfort and servants and good food and easy times. They mean nothing in the sum total of things that count. Most men never have them at the beginning. They make them. What you've never given us is *yourself*. And we *needed* you. What you've never given us is common sense. You've been a good father in every inessential way, but no father at all in all that goes to make us men. You've lived in a fool's paradise. You've let us find our own way. You've not given us one human talk — one simple fact — one word of warning. You've utterly neglected us because you're a coward and you've hoped and trusted that others might tell us what you've been afraid to say. Afraid,— to your own flesh and blood,— think of it!"

The Doctor cried out again. He realized much of the truth of all this. He had confessed himself to be painfully shy to his wife many times and had spent God knew how many anxious hours wondering how

he could get to know his boys. But it was too much to stand and be whipped by his son.

"There are thousands of fathers who hold my views and act as I have acted," he said.

"And there are so many thousands of sons who have to pay for those views that you and men like you spend your lives in trying to save them."

The Doctor drew in his breath. "Wh-what d'you mean?" he stammered.

"Ah! that gets you, doesn't it? Now you're beginning to see what I'm driving at, don't you? Put your mind back to the night you found Graham here with me. You saved him from forging your name, and that was good. But what led him up to that? Did you ask yourself? Did you go to Graham and gain his confidence? Did you wonder whether there was a woman behind it all who would never have come into his life if you had dealt by him like a man and a father,— the sort of woman who has made necessary these things round your laboratory and caused you to bend over your experiments for years and years?"

"Good God! What do you mean?"

Peter raised his voice. "Why should your sons be immune? What have *you* ever done to render them so? Why am I now standing here with this revolver in my hand? Look at me! A few hours ago I had health and everything in the world that makes life worth living, except a father. At this moment, because I've never had a father, I'm so terrified that I should be a criminal if I married the girl I love that I'm going to kill myself."

"Why? What have you done?"

"I've been two nights in the bed of the sort of woman whose work you are trying to undo."

The Doctor staggered, and then rose up in his wrath. "*You* have? You, *my* son,— with such a mother — with such home influence! You mean to tell me that you've descended to such depths of immorality that you've gone back on everything that your education has made of you? It's unthinkable — unbelievable. You must be a mere animal to have done such a thing."

What else he would have said in his emotion and horror no one can say.

A cry of pain and rage rang out. The injustice of his father's narrow, inhuman point of view, his inability to show him, even by his impending death, that he must wake up to his duty and stand by Graham and his sisters, sent the blood into Peter's fevered brain.

"My God!" he cried. "You dare to talk like that to me? You dare to kick me in the face after I've told you that I'm ignorant — without listening to my explanation as to how I got into that woman's apartment. All right, then, I'm not going to be the only one to pay. You shall take your share of it. The sins of the children are brought about by the neglect of the fathers, and we'll go and stand together before the Judge to-night for a verdict on that count."

He raised the revolver, aimed it at his father's head, put his finger on the trigger ——

There was a blinding flash of lightning. A yellow

quivering flame seemed to cut the room in half between the two angry men ——

An instant later the Doctor saw Peter standing with both hands over his face. The unfired revolver lay on the table in all its ugliness. And presently, when he had realized what had happened, he went nearer. "God didn't intend that you should do that," he said. And then his voice broke and he went forward to put his arms round Peter's shoulders. "Give me another chance, my dearest boy!" he cried. "Give me another chance!"

But before he could reach his son the great big hurt boy crumpled and fell in a heap at his feet.

XX

For three weeks Peter's bedroom was the one room in the house to which the eyes of all the family were wholly turned. There, in the dark, he lay a victim to an attack of brain fever. Never in a condition of great danger, poor old Peter was ill and the Doctor, who, better than the rest, knew that death has many doors through which life goes out, eyed the specialist who had been called in with pathetic eagerness.

The little mother and Belle were joined at once by Betty, and the three women sat very close together, speaking and even thinking in whispers during the first two days. To the one whose first child he was and the one who waited to be his wife, Peter meant everything good that life had for them, and in their terror

that he might be taken away their imaginations ran ahead, as they always do in moments of such poignant anxiety, and they were afraid to look out of the window in case they should see Death, the black camel, kneeling at the gate.

While the shadow seemed to rest on his house, Dr. Guthrie did many things. First of all he went over all the terrible words that Peter had said to him that bad and unforgettable night. With great humbleness and deep emotion he accepted them as the truth. He sat for hours at his desk with his hands over his face and tears leaking through his fingers. Metaphorically he placed his old hard-working, concentrated self in the criminal stand and his new startled, humbled and ashamed self in the Judge's seat and summed up his life as a father. It was very plain that he had failed in his duty to his boys. He had made no great effort to conquer that queer shyness which had affected him from the beginning. He had allowed his children to grow up to regard him as Bluebeard. He had thrown upon his wife's slight shoulders all the onus of the responsibility for the human development of their characters, and because she had succeeded while they were young he had, like a coward, neglected to step in and take upon himself his obvious duty when they had grown old enough to need more — much more — than the soft guiding hand of a mother. He had allowed them to make an early start,— the girls, as well as the boys,— without understanding the vital necessity of duty and discipline which he alone could inspire in them, because no man or woman in all the country,

in any school or college, gave a single thought to either. He had hidden behind a hundred weak and foolish excuses in order to avoid the so-called difficulties of speaking manfully to these two embryo men. He had permitted them to grow out of boyhood without giving them the benefit of his own uninitiated struggles, or the simple warnings and facts which take the glamour away from temptation and make straight ways easy. He "took chances," and hoped that some one else might by accident give them the facts of sex or that they would find them out themselves, as other young men were obliged to do,— never mind how.

Remorse and regret made Hell for this man in those honest hours,— this good, exemplary, distinguished, self-made man whose name would live by his professional efforts and scientific discoveries and who had succeeded in everything except as a father.

And then he called Graham into his room, and sitting knee to knee with his second son, was brave enough to tell him wherein he now knew that he had failed and asked of him, as he had asked of Peter, for another chance. It was a pathetic and emotional talk that these two had, during which both told the truth, hiding nothing, reserving nothing. The outcome of it was good for them both, as well as for Peter. They went together to see Nellie Pope and heard from her lips, to the Doctor's unspeakable thankfulness, that Peter was in no danger from her. From that time onwards that little, kind, wretched girl became one of the Doctor's patients in the proper hospital, eventually to be

placed by him at work which rendered the need for her following her chosen profession unnecessary.

And finally the day came when Peter was able to receive visitors, and a very good day it was. The little mother went in first — she had the right. Peter was sitting in his dressing-gown by the window. To his intense relief he had just passed through the hands of a barber, whom he had asked to make him look a little less like a poet. He turned his head quickly towards the door as his mother went in. His old high spirits had returned. The sun was shining and life looked very good. His imagination made him as well aware of the fact that his mother had been through some of the most anxious hours of her life as though he had seen her sitting in her room below with a drawn white face and her hands clasped together. He got up and went to meet her. He took her in his arms and held her very tight. What they said to each other was far too sacred to put into cold print. They spoke in undertone, because the trained nurse kept a jealous eye upon her patient and moved in and out of the dressing-room adjoining. The interview was not allowed to be a long one. The last thing that Peter said to his mother made her very happy. "I think that the Governor and I are pals," he said. "I think we've found each other at last. Isn't that just about the best thing you ever heard?"

In the afternoon Belle was allowed in. To his great relief she told him in her characteristic, concise way, how she felt about Kenyon. He caught her young, she said — marvellously young, "and if he should ever

come back to New York all he'll get from me will be two fingers. I've quite recovered. So you may take that line out of your forehead, old boy. One of these days when you're out and about again we'll walk about four times round the reservoir and I'll tell you something of what's been going through my mind while you've been ill. In fact, we'll have a very substantial pow-wow about Nicholas Kenyon, and I don't think we shall leave him quite as immaculate as he usually is by the time we've finished, do you?"

"No," said Peter, "I don't. All the same, I'm grateful to him for one thing. He has brought father out of his shell,— that's about the best thing he ever did in his life."

There was something amusing as well as touching in the way in which the two brothers met again. It was the next morning early. Peter was still in bed, with his hair all frowzled and the remains of sleep still in the corners of his eyes. Graham had ten minutes before he was obliged to leave the house to go downtown.

"Hello, old sport!" said Graham.

"Hello, sonnie! Rather a hot thing in ties, that, eh?"

Graham cleared his throat and put his hand rather self-consciously to the black-and-white effect newly designed by his pet firm of haberdashers. "I think it'll make the senior partner blink all right," he said. "How d'you feel this morning?"

Peter showed his teeth. "I'm sitting up and taking nourishment. Probably before the end of the

week you'll see me in shorts and a zephyr sprinting round the park before breakfast."

"I'd like to," said Graham, and he held out his hand.

Peter took it and gave it a scrunch which had in it nothing of the invalid. "Give my love to the subway," he said, "and my kind regards to Wall Street."

Graham grinned, waved his hand and left the room. He found it necessary to blow his nose rather hard on his way down-stairs. "Oh, Gee!" he said to himself. "Oh, Gee! Only think if Peter had —" He didn't allow himself to finish the thought.

And then came Betty, and the way in which she and Peter came together — the way in which they stood only a step or two from the door, inarticulate in their love and thankfulness, was too much even for the trained nurse, to whom love and death and the great hereafter were mere commonplaces. She withdrew to the dressing-room and stayed there for a whole solid quarter-of-an-hour, eliminating herself with a tactfulness for which Peter blessed her and Betty became her friend for all time.

"My baby!" said Peter. "We shall have to begin all over again. We're almost strangers."

But Betty shook her head. "No," she said. "No. There hasn't been one moment during all this time that I haven't been with you."

And Peter nodded. "That's dead true," he said.

And then they sat down very close together and the things they said to each other are lost to the world,

because we joined the nurse in the next room and shut the door.

XXI

It happened that the anniversary of Doctor and Mrs. Guthrie's wedding day,— they had been married twenty-eight years,— fell on a Sunday that year.

The night before, at dinner, the little mother, thankful and happy at having Peter back again at the table, asked a favour. In having to ask it, instead of simply saying that she desired her children to go with her to church the next morning, she proved her knowledge of the fact that she had joined the ranks of mothers whose children have outgrown them.

Mrs. Guthrie was, however, one of those rather rare women who had grown old gracefully. The hand of time, whose natural treatment she had made no sort of endeavor to combat, had added to her beauty. Optimism, a steady faith in God and His goodness, and the usual gift of accepting whatever came to her without kicking against the pricks, had mellowed her. It was without any of the spirit of martyrdom that cakes the nature of those women who have not been able to acquire the best sort of philosophy that she frankly made this very natural and easily fulfilled desire a favour. Peter was well again and she wanted to kneel before the altar of the Great Father and give thanks, surrounded by her children, on the anniversary of the day that made her a wife.

The family had grown out of the habit of going to

church,— Belle was tired, as a rule, after a late Saturday night, Graham was an inveterate week-ender, Ethel was a modernist, and Peter played golf,— and so, when they all agreed without any argument the little mother was almost as surprised as she was delighted.

The conspiracy of silence which the family had tacitly agreed upon during their recent trouble, in order to spare her from unhappiness, left Mrs. Guthrie wholly without any knowledge of the fact that they were all glad of an excuse to join her in church, because they all felt a curious eagerness to listen to the simple, beautiful service with which they had grown up and to kneel once more — more humbly and sincerely than ever before — in the house of the God who had been instrumental in their various escapes.

It would have been better if Mrs. Guthrie had not been so carefully shielded — if she had been made to share with the Doctor the blame,— at any rate for the mistakes which the two girls had made,— from the fact that she had let go the reins of duty and discipline with which she had held them in their early years and given them their heads — if she had been strong enough and wise enough to maintain over Belle and Ethel, without autocratically putting a stop to their having "a good time," the authority of respect, won by love and the exercise of sympathy and common sense — if, in short, she had not been content to slip into a position that allowed these high-spirited girls to say to themselves quite so early in their lives, "Oh, poor, dear little mother doesn't understand. She

doesn't know anything that modern girls have to go through." She was shielded because it was understood that she was a sort of sleeping partner — not an active member of the firm. She was regarded as being so sweet and soft and old-fashioned that she couldn't possibly appreciate the conditions of the times in which the girls lived. Their early positions had become reversed. It was the girls who mothered their mother.

It was a strangely silent party that returned home that Sunday morning, headed by the Doctor and the little mother. Betty had been invited by Mrs. Guthrie to join them and was to stay to lunch. It was while they were in the hall, and just as Betty had gone upstairs with Mrs. Guthrie, that the Doctor turned quickly. "I want you all to come to my room," he said. "I won't keep you more than a few moments," and led the way.

Wondering what was going to happen, but taking trouble to avoid catching each other's eyes, Peter, Graham, Belle and Ethel followed their father across the library into the room which, for the two boys, had associations that they were never likely to forget, and for the two girls had hitherto been a place to avoid.

As soon as they were in the room the Doctor shut the door and, from force of habit, went over to his desk. With one thin hand on it, and with a shaft of winter sun on a face that was very lined and pale he stood there for a moment in silence. His lips trembled a little, but there was a look in his eyes behind

those strong glasses that his children had never seen before.

"Peter, Graham, Belle and my little Ethel," he said brokenly, "I'm going to ask you all, on a day that means a great deal to your mother and to me, and so to you, to forgive me for not having been all that I ought to have been to you I know that I've failed in my duty as a father. You have always been my most precious possessions and it is for you that I've worked so hard and so closely, but because of all that I went through as a child and because I never struggled as I ought to have done to overcome a foolish shyness that has made me self-conscious, you and I have never been friends — have never understood each other. I take all the blame for whatever you have done that has made you suffer and of which you are ashamed. Very humbly, I stand before you now and ask you, as I asked Peter, here, in this room, to give me another chance. Let's make a new beginning from to-day, with the knowledge that I love you better than anything in the world. I want you all to meet me halfway in future, to look upon me no longer as the shy, unsympathetic, unapproachable man who, by accident, is your father, but as your closest and most intimate friend whose best and dearest wish is to help you and listen to your worries and give you all the advice in his power. I want this room to be the place to which you'll always come with the certain knowledge that you'll be welcomed by me with the greatest eagerness and delight. Don't let there be anything from to-day onwards that you can't tell me. Promise me that. I

— I've told myself two or three times that it's too late for me to be of any use to you — that having failed I could never repair my mistake or ever hope to win your confidence and friendship."

His voice broke so badly that he was unable to speak, and the painfulness of this strange little scene was almost more than those young people could bear. It hurt them enough to stand facing a man who opened his soul for them to gaze into, especially when that man was their father. It was dreadful to see him blinded by tears in the middle of an appeal which they all realized called for such extreme courage and strength of character to make.

They all wanted to do something to help him and force him out of a humbleness that made them horribly self-conscious. It was Peter who did it. With two strides he stood at the Doctor's side and put his arms round his shoulder.

The Doctor looked up into the face of the great big, tender fellow, whose eyes were eloquent, and smiled. Then he found his voice again and forced himself to the bitter end of what he had determined to say. "Something in the way you've all treated me since Peter has been ill," he said, "has given me hope. That's why I put myself in your hands, my dears. Shall we make a new beginning? Will you take me into your friendship? Will you all give me another chance?"

With a little cry from her heart Belle went forward and put her arms round her father's neck, and Ethel, with hot tears running down her face, crept up to

him and put one of his hands to her lips. Graham bent over the other, which he held tight, and Peter, who had longed for this moment through all his illness, didn't give a curse who heard his voice break, patted the Doctor on the back, and said: "Dear old man, my dear old father!" over and over again.

THE END